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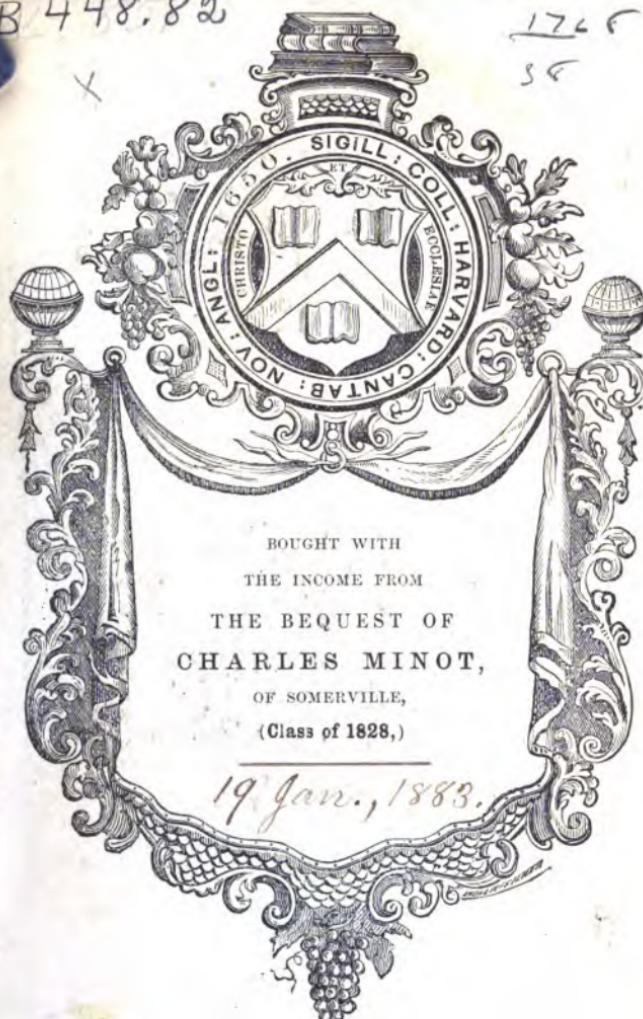
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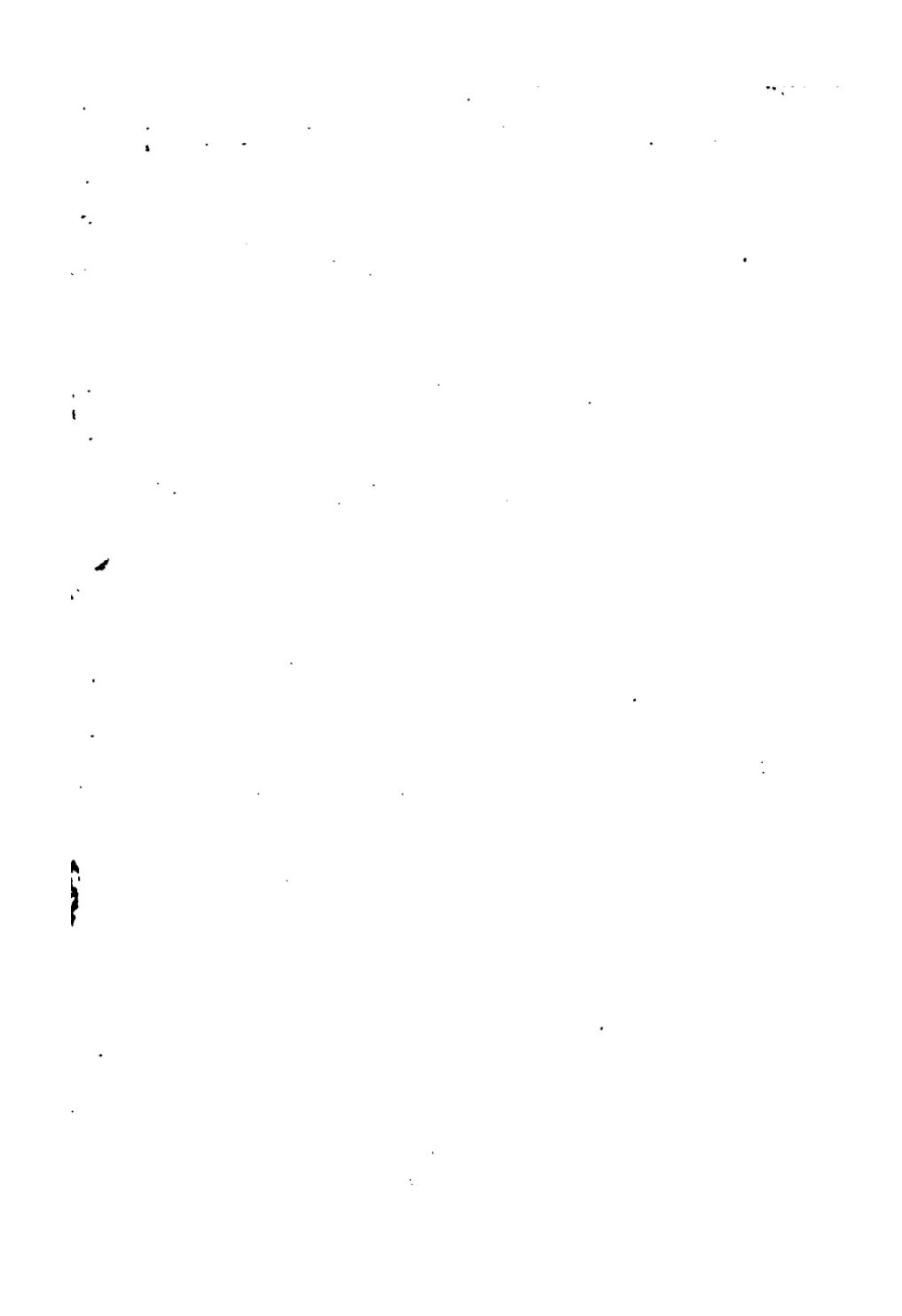


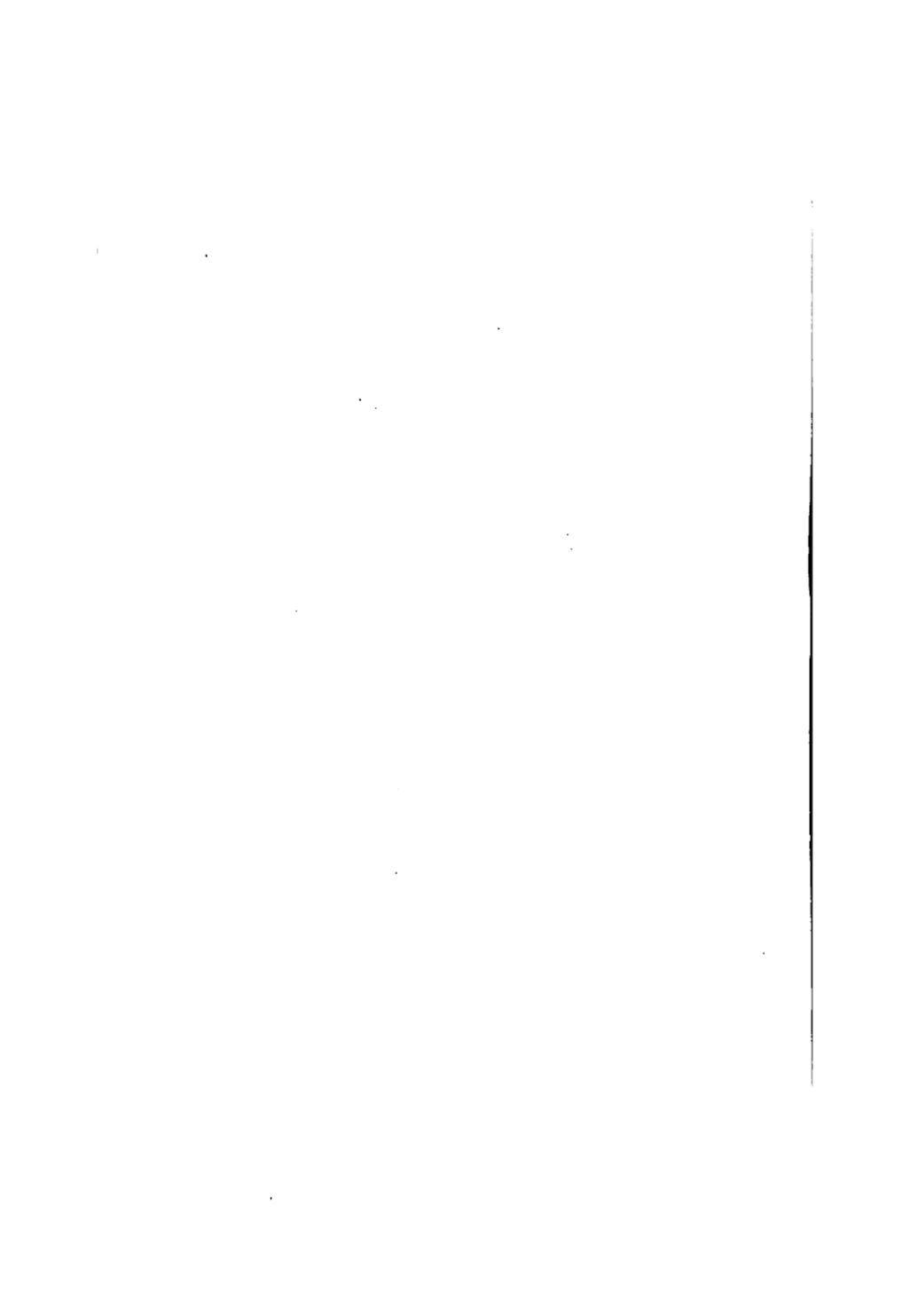
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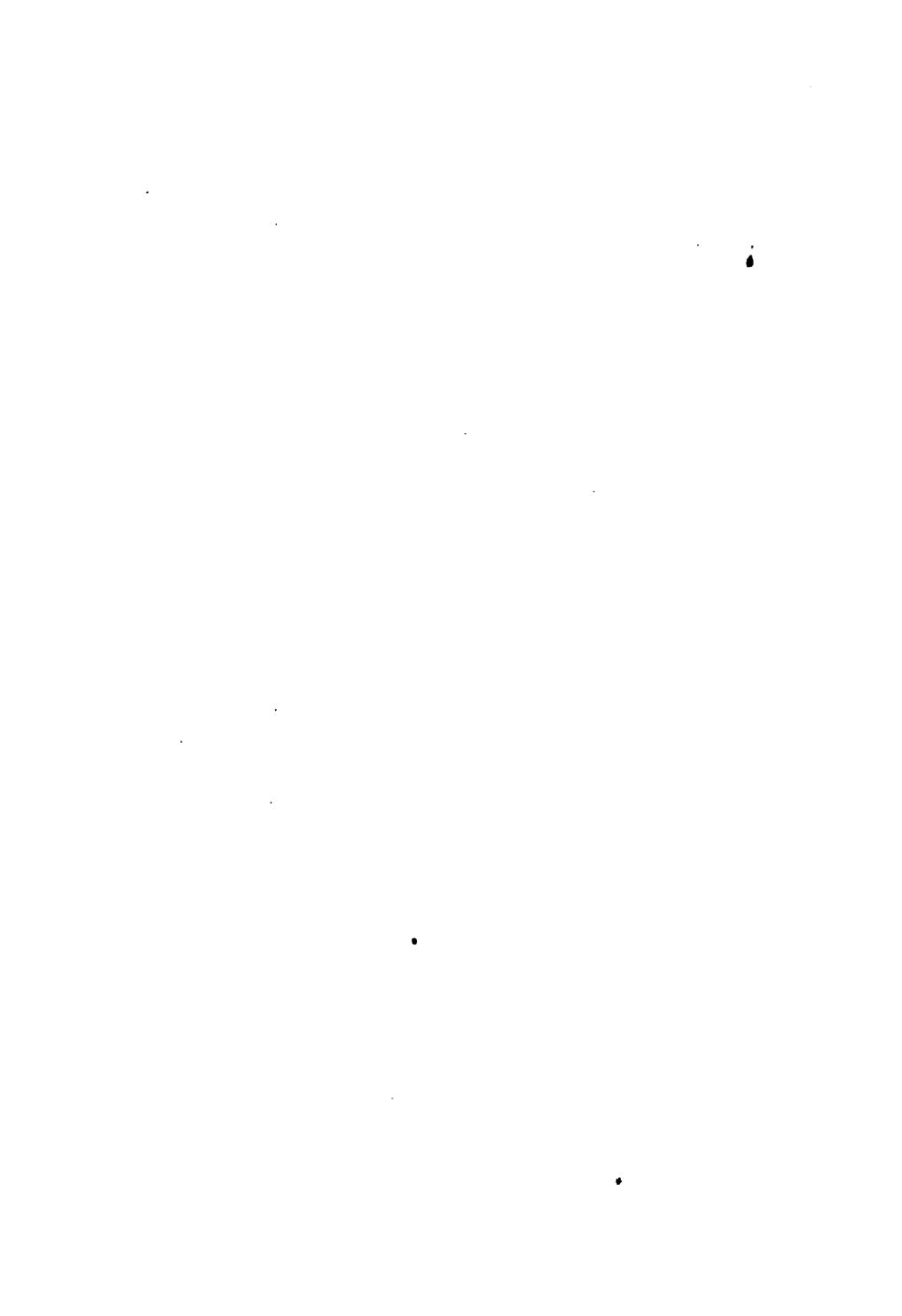
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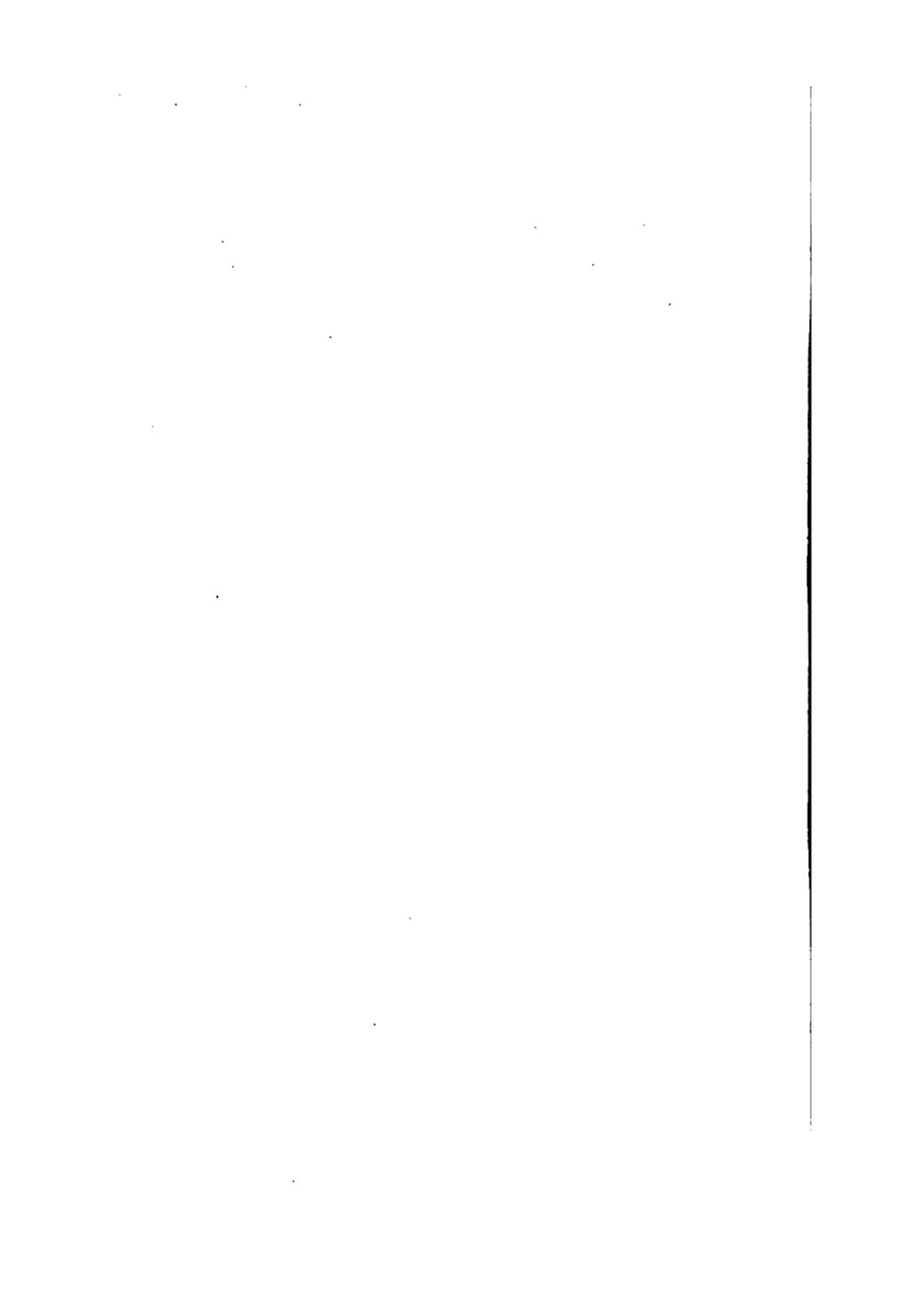
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William Shakespeare

The Highways of Literature
Frontispiece

◎ THE
HIGHWAYS OF LITERATURE;
OR,
WHAT TO READ AND HOW TO READ.

BY

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OF ENGLISH LITERATURE,' 'GREAT MEN OF EUROPEAN HISTORY,'
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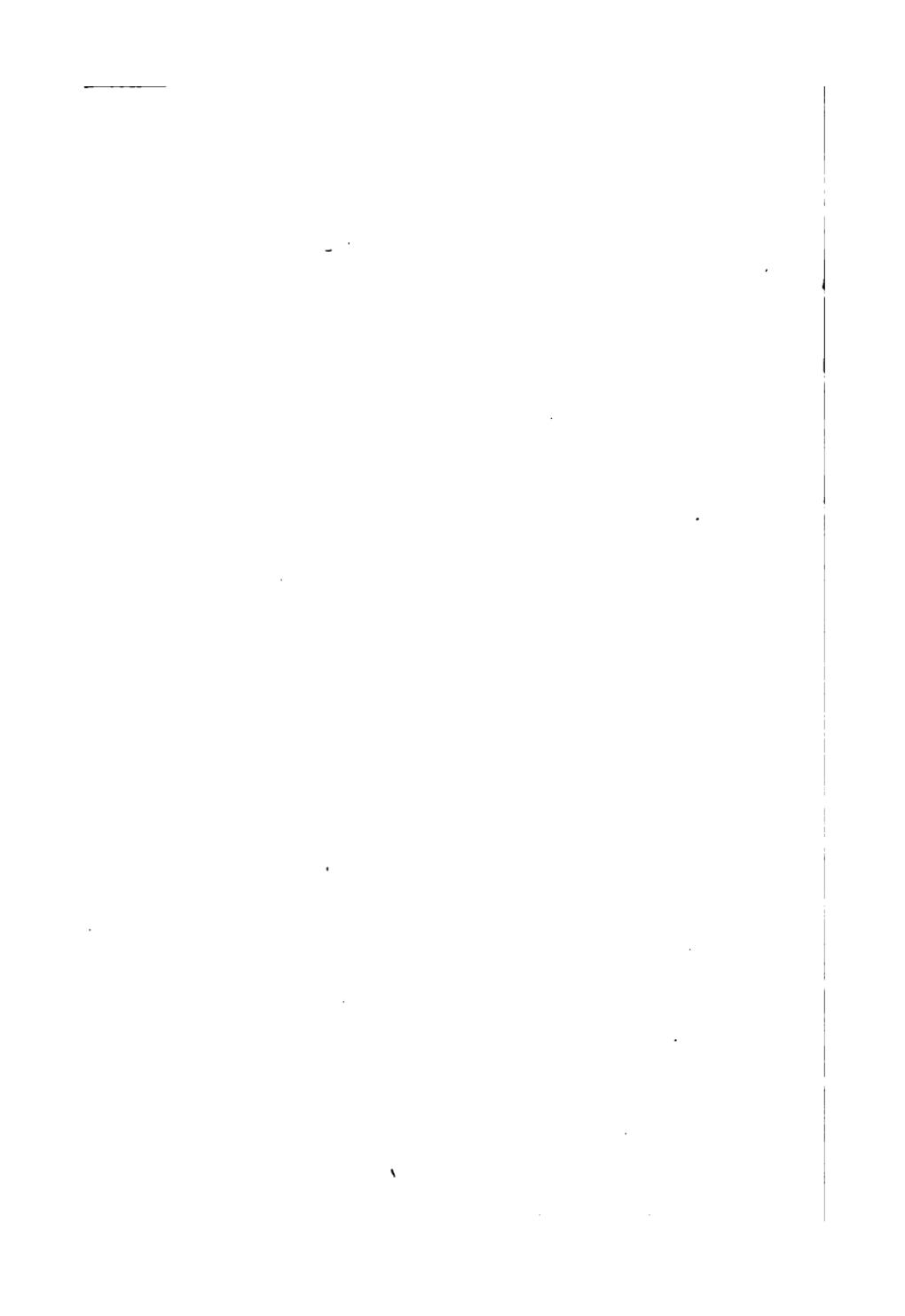
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THE EDINBURGH LADIES' COLLEGE

AND OF

THE WATT INSTITUTION AND SCHOOL OF ARTS,

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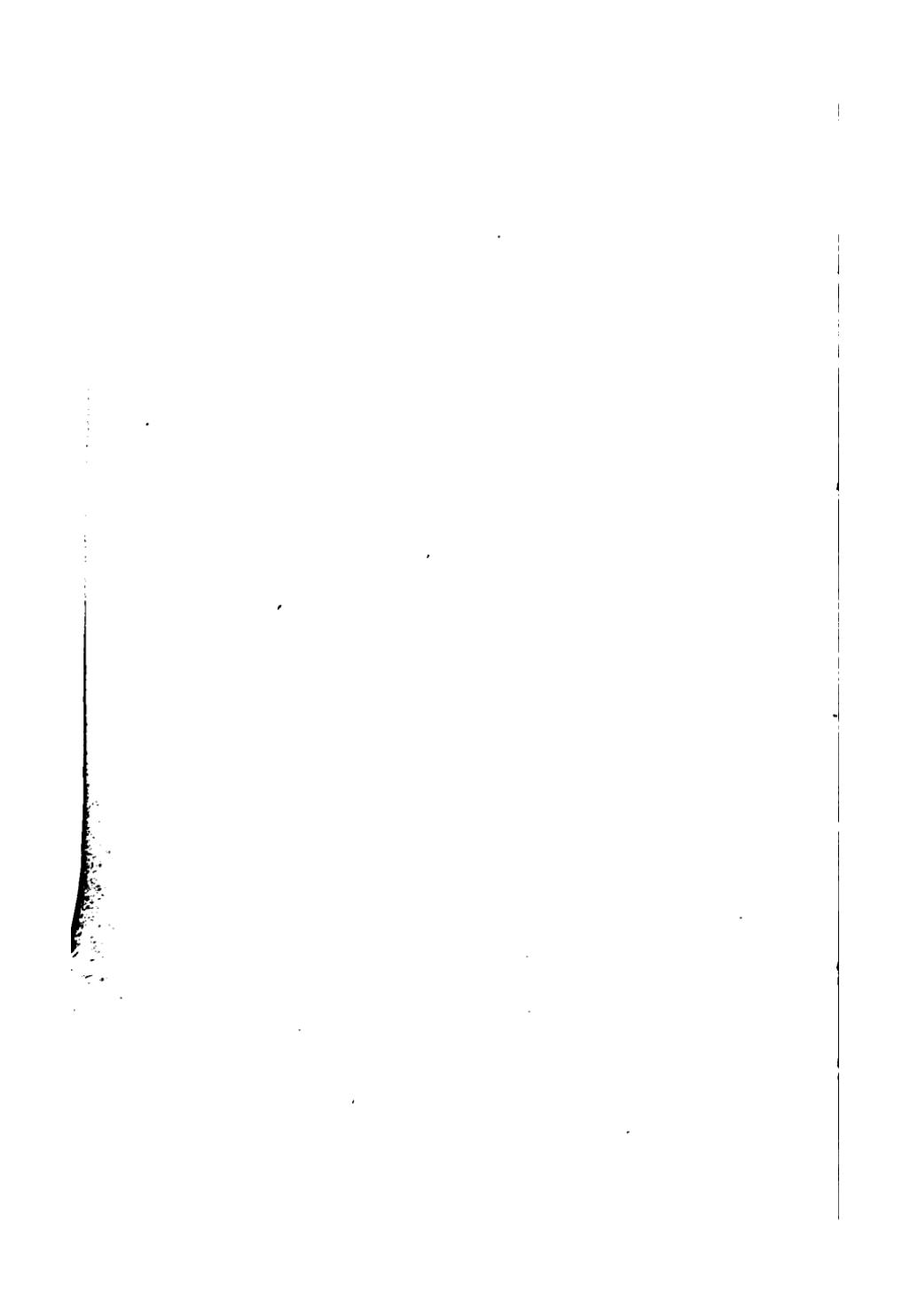
P R E F A C E.

THE multitude of books has now become almost overwhelming. Many of these are comparatively worthless; and it is quite possible for a man to go on reading for a lifetime and never light upon the great standard works. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that every earnest reader should be able to discover the best books, and study them properly after they have been discovered.

This is precisely the task which the present work undertakes. Both in the chapter on Books in General, and also in those on the different kinds of literature, it lays down rules by which the reader, in the *first* place, may identify for himself the best authors, and, in the *second* place, may study them in such a way that they will be of use in the duties of everyday life.

D. P.

EDINBURGH, *September* 1882.





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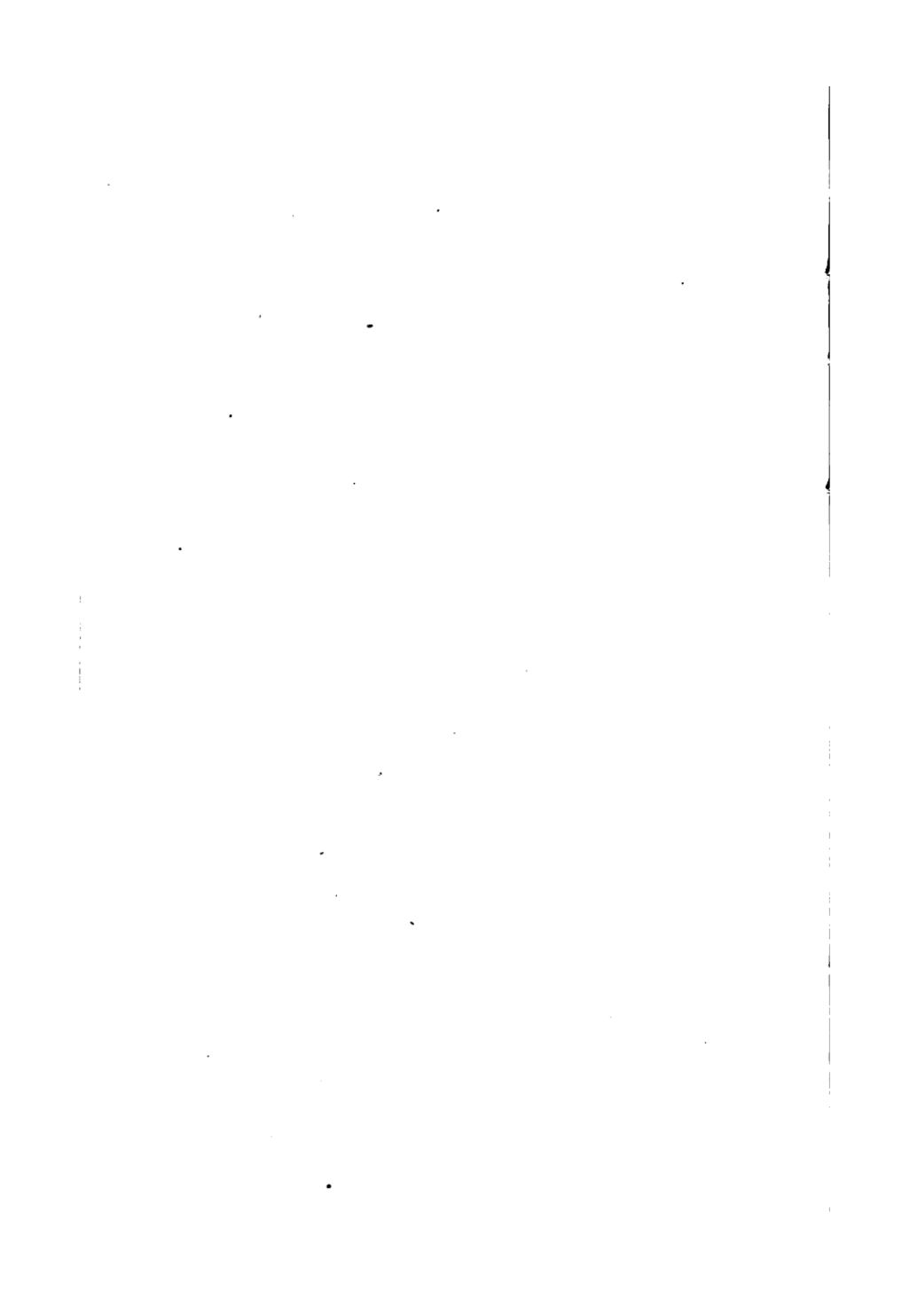
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THE HIGHWAYS OF LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

BOOKS IN GENERAL.

IN treating of the reading of books, we will not refer to all kinds of books. We will limit our remarks to what are called literary works, or works that are expected to be characterized by art and taste in composition. Guided by that definition, we will include books relating to mental philosophy, history, biography, poetry, fiction, and descriptions of men and scenery; and we will omit treatises concerning scientific subjects, particular callings and trades, and theological doctrines and sentiments.

Every intelligent person in the present day is impressed with the great advantages to be derived

from reading. We need not, therefore, waste any time in showing these advantages. But we will try to revive your impression by drawing a contrast between the man of *no* culture and the man of *high* culture.

Look first at the poor unlettered rustic. He has never been taught to think or read. His intellect is still confined in his five senses. It takes in nothing but dull images of the byways along which he plods, the beasts of the field, the forms of his relatives and neighbours, and the slow-paced routine of agricultural life. The distant and the past are to him a complete void. His soul is tied to the present, and to that small spot of the earth's surface on which he moves in his daily rounds.

Look now at the accomplished man of letters. He sits in his quiet study with clear head, sympathetic heart, and lively fancy. The walls around him are lined with books on every subject, and in almost every tongue. He is, indeed, a man of magical powers, and these books are his magical volumes full of wonder-working spells. When he opens one of these and reads with eye and soul intent, in a few minutes the objects around him fade from his senses,

and his soul is rapt away into distant regions, or into bygone times. It may be a book descriptive of other lands ; and then he feels himself, perhaps, amid the biting frost and snowy ice-hills of the polar winter, or in the fierce heat and luxuriant vegetation of the equator, panting up the steeps of the Alps with the holiday tourist, or exploring the mazes of the Nile with Livingstone or Baker. Or, perchance, it may be a history of England ; and then the tide of time runs back, and he finds himself among our stout-hearted ancestors : he enters heartily into all their toil and struggles ; he passes amid the fires of Smith-field at the Reformation ; he shares in all the wrangling, and dangers, and suspense of the Revolution ; he watches with eager gaze the steady progress of the nation, until he sees British freedom become the envy of Europe, and British enterprise secure a foot-hold in every quarter of the globe. Or perhaps the book may be one of our great English classics,—*Shakespeare, Bacon, or Carlyle*,—and immediately he is in the closest contact with a spirit far larger than his own : his mind grasps its grand ideas, his heart imbibes its glowing sentiments, until he finds himself dilated, refined, inspired—a greater and a nobler

being. Thus does this scholar's soul grow and extend itself until it lives in every region of the earth and in every bygone age, and holds the most intimate intercourse with the spirits of the mighty dead; and thus, though originally a frail mortal creature, he rises toward the godlike attributes of omnipresence and omniscience.

There is no doubt, then, that books are the instruments of almost miraculous power in the hands of a scholar. But two important questions now start up—I. What books are we to read? and II. How are we to read them?

I. What books are we to read? The great difficulty in the way of answering this question is the incalculable number of books. Ever since the days of Moses, men have been writing books. And now both men and women are writing books faster than ever. The 'itch for scribbling' has become an epidemic. The crowd of eager authors is becoming almost alarming:

'All Bedlam or Parnassus is let out.
Fire in each eye, and pamphlets in each hand,
They rave, recite, and madden through the land.'

In course of time, we can almost imagine, it will be difficult to find a man who has not been guilty of authorship; and when he is found, he will be regarded as a miracle of self-denial, and perhaps a wiser and happier man than his fellow-creatures.

Different men have different ways of dealing with this multitude of books. One man, very unsophisticated, buys all the new works that are recommended to him, arranges them on the shelves of what he calls his 'library,' does not cut them up, for fear, apparently, lest the knowledge in them should all run out, sits down in the midst of them, and fancies that by looking at their outsides he is actually becoming learned. Another man, more active, reads everything in the shape of a volume that comes to hand. It may be *Locke on the Human Understanding*, or *Berkeley on Tar Water*, for it matters not provided it is *print*. And he tells you, with a self-satisfied face, that he is 'fond of his reading.' Possibly! But 'his reading' is evidently not fond of him, for it takes the very first opportunity of vanishing, and leaves him with as empty a head as it found him. A third man most religiously peruses all the Monthlies and Quarterlies, and

imagines that while he is reading what are called reviews, but what are really in many cases distorted fragments of new works, he is mastering the new works themselves. He is as much mistaken as the poor half-naked savage, who believed that he had secured a full European suit when he picked up a hat and a pair of dress-boots.

All these methods, it need scarcely be said, are unsatisfactory. The true method seems to consist of two steps: (1.) To read first the one or two great standard works in each department of literature; and (2.) To confine then our reading to that department which suits the particular bent of our mind.

These two steps would tend to make us achieve in literature what John Stuart Mill says every student should achieve in the domain of universal knowledge, namely, 'The knowing something of everything, and everything of something.'

(1.) Let us first see how standard works come to be of use amid the overwhelming multitude of books. Men have a natural tendency to imitate each other in their opinions as well as in other peculiarities. Besides, they are lazy by nature, and would rather appropriate an idea ready-made than

have the trouble of forming one for themselves. Hence we often hear one opinion echoed from one hollow skull to another, round the whole circle of a political party; and when we learn Brown's views on the Education Act, we can easily infer what those of Jones and Robinson must be. This same law likewise influences authors. They, too, are lazy, and they, too, imitate each other. They look at a subject from the same point of view, read each other's works, and, willingly or unwillingly, borrow from each other. It is true that, like the robber who melts down a piece of plate to efface the marks of the owner, they put the idea into a new mould of language and a new setting; but it is essentially unchanged. When we attempt to read through all the books on a particular subject, we are soon disgusted and wearied out by the sameness that meets us everywhere. We feel ourselves, in fact, lost in a weary and far-extending waste of commonplaces. Now, it is here that the standard author comes to our aid. He rises like a special dispensation of Providence to save us from mental bewilderment and death. With brave heart he explores the boundless wilds of literature in his

own department; with sleepless activity of mind he ransacks one work after another; and with the unfailing tact of genius he picks out from each whatever is excellent in thought or manner. All these excellences he then recasts in his own intellect, adds new ideas and beauties of his own, and thus produces a work which is the embodiment of almost everything that is good in that particular walk of letters. He produces what Mr. Ruskin calls *a work of Time*, in contradistinction to *a work of the Hour*. Such standard authors form certainly one of the greatest blessings that have been bestowed upon poor perplexed readers. They are like mountains, rising sheer in the midst of a flat landscape, and catching and presenting to the world the imposing gleams and splendours of heaven. They are like well-ordered gardens, containing in one romantic spot the choice vegetable produce of a whole clime. They are the real fixed stars in the Abyss of Time—suns ablaze with heat and splendour; and the other authors are but planets shining with light borrowed from them. They are kings by divine right, the great representatives of the human race, endowed specially with wisdom from

on high, and commissioned with an authority, which cannot be gainsaid, to sway the hearts of the multitude. Shakespeare! Bacon! Milton! Gibbon! Burns! Scott! Carlyle! Emerson! Having mastered them, we have mastered in a concentrated form the whole of English literature.

We would therefore advise young students to study these great classic masterpieces. If you cannot read them all, read at least one, give your whole attention to it, put yourself in the position of the author, follow him intently through all his ideas and feelings, live in his spirit as in an atmosphere, make his whole work part of your own soul. Do not care although you are taunted with not knowing *many* books. When old Hobbes was asked why he had not read more: 'Read more!' he exclaimed, 'if I had read as many books as other men, I would have been as ignorant as other men.' 'Dread,' says the Latin proverb, 'the man of one book!' What a formidable antagonist he would be who had thoroughly studied Shakespeare, who had grasped his plots, who had analyzed his characters, who had scaled his highest thoughts, who had sounded his deepest pathos, who had caught the

aroma of his most delicate fancies ! What a grasp of intellect he would have ! What a breadth of sympathy ! What a knowledge of human nature ! What a command of wit and wisdom and choice sentiments : 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn' !

Let us suppose, then, that you have studied one or more of these standard authors, and that you are still anxious to extend your acquaintance with books. Our next advice is to confine your reading to that department which suits the bent of your mind. But here the question starts up, 'How are we to discover that bent ?' This question we shall now try to answer.

Your amateur lecturer, descanting upon his pet topic of *self-culture*, is fond of giving a list of his favourite authors, and telling what effect they have had upon him, and he exhorts his audience to read the same books, in order that they may achieve the same results. He forgets that different men have different tastes, and that possibly the mental food, which has made him so self-satisfied and sprightly, may leave them still lean and hungry. He forgets, too, that it might not be advisable to have all men

moulded after one model, even although that model should be such an admirable person as himself ; that such an arrangement might not harmonize with the order of things and the designs of Providence ; nay, that it would very likely make the world intolerably dreary and commonplace. Speaking for ourselves, we ~~would~~^{sh} be afraid to prescribe to a miscellaneous audience any list of books beyond a few standard authors such as those already mentioned. No ! We would rather say to you : Never adopt as a matter of course the favourite authors of any man. Do not jump about from book to book, trying to read what any would-be judge recommends to you. Do not lose yourself in purposeless, desultory reading to please any man. Your time is precious, and the more precious it is, the more select should your reading be. Carry into your studies the great principle of the division of labour, and confine your attention to that one class of books which suits your capacity best. Make choice of this class of books deliberately and carefully ; and in order that you may choose with certainty, let us point out the three characteristics which these books should have. They should (1) interest, (2) call into play the mental

powers, and (3) make us more fit for our everyday duties. They should have, not one merely, but *all* of these characteristics. Let us show how essential they all are.

First of all, the book which you would choose *must interest you*. Shakespeare says :

‘No profit grows where is no pleasure ta’en.
In brief, sir ! study what you most affect.’

If you have no appetite, your bodily food will not nourish you ; and if you have no interest in what you read, your reading will be of no service. If you are not interested, you will not open your mind ; and if you do not open your mind, you will take in no ideas. The book may be one of the great masterpieces, full of high ideas and noble sentiments, yet to you it will be nothing but a mass of printed paper. But on the other hand, if, while you read, you find your attention absorbed, then the work has the *first* characteristic of a suitable book. It has the first characteristic, but not necessarily the others. With all its interest, it may be some inane novel which only kills your precious hours. Mere interest, therefore, is not enough in a work. *It must, in the second place, have the power of calling the mental faculties*

into play. A book, if it is really a genuine work, is composed of the very substance of the author's spiritual being. There, wrapped up in words and sentiments, lie those thoughts that flashed through his brain, and those feelings that tingled in his heart. There lurks his very soul, ready to start up when occasion calls. Now if, while reading a work, you feel your soul come into contact with his,—if, in other words, you feel yourself drawn towards him, and entering spontaneously into his ideas and sentiments,—then you may conclude that the author is a kindred spirit, and that his book so far suits your capacity. And if the author, like Carlyle or Emerson, scatters through his pages hints of great ideas, which set your mind a-working, and makes it start on a voyage of discovery into the realms of truth, you may conclude that he has one of the most essential qualifications of a great teacher. But even this characteristic is not altogether enough. The book may be a one-sided work, representing the world as a God-forsaken chaos, and man as the victim of pitiless chance, and poisoning the very springs of your being with discontent and scorn. A book, therefore, must have still *another requisite*,

namely, *a tendency to make you fitter for your everyday duties.* The great end of life, after all, is not to think, but to act; not to be learned, but to be good and noble. Accordingly, the crowning merit of a book must always be its practical usefulness. It may be a work of fiction, diverting your thoughts from the chaos of business, and allowing your mind to recover its elasticity and its tone; or a history, bringing before you high examples for your imitation; or a poem, elevating and refining your taste, and filling your imagination with beautiful forms; or the work of a Christian philosopher, rousing you, as with the blast of a trumpet, from self-indulgence to self-sacrifice. If it makes you more cheerful, or more amiable, or more sympathetic, or more appreciative of what is beautiful, or more resolute to follow what is good and noble, then the highest purpose of a book is gained.

These, then, are the three requisites which every suitable book must have. If in any particular class of works you find not one or two but *all* of these three requisites, then you may safely conclude that you have come upon your special line of reading. All you have to do is to follow it perseveringly. The

region into which you have entered may at first seem strange and somewhat dull, but it will always be growing more familiar and more pleasant, until you will feel yourself thoroughly in your element. And do not fear lest you should become contracted in your knowledge. Every line of study must meet and cross some other lines; and thus, while you will be acquiring a particular knowledge of your own department, you will be forming a general knowledge of other departments.

II. We have now seen what books each of us ought to read. Let us now see how we ought to read them.

Different men have different ways of reading books. One man, believing that there is some mystic virtue in the mere printed letters themselves, dozes over a few pages of a volume, and fancies that he gains wisdom by following a plan that is often recommended to those whose brains are perplexed, namely, the plan of 'sleeping upon a subject.' Another, bent upon making a display, charges his mind with some particular information (just as he would charge a musket with shot), and, when the occasion comes,

fires it off, and remains as empty as he was before. Another, a perfect literary glutton, reads books on all subjects and in all languages, and burdens his mind with so many facts of different kinds that it reels and vacillates, and is unfit for the particular duties of life. His friends admiringly call him a 'dungeon of learning;' and indeed so he is, for everything that comes out of him is musty, and mouldy, and useless. He is, in fact,

‘A bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head.

Sb

The method of reading that we would recommend is very definite, and consists of several distinct steps.

1. *Before you begin to peruse a book, know something about the author.* When you read a work written by a person you know, you are far more interested in it than in a stranger's book. You imagine you hear him speaking, and you see more in many of the allusions than you would otherwise have done. We would therefore advise you to get, if possible, a biographical notice of the writer whose work you are about to study. You will thus, as it were, be introduced to him. You will become ac-

quainted with his life, his character, and the circumstances amid which he composed the book ; and you will therefore read his pages with far more pleasure and intelligence. When we read, for instance, the life of Burns, and see how sorely he was tossed by passion and mischance, what a depth of pathos appears in the following lines :—

‘Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman ;
Though they may gang a kennin’ wrang,
To step aside is human.

‘One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it ;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

‘Who made the heart, ‘tis He alone
Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias.

‘Then at the balance let’s be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What’s done we partly may compute,
But know not what’s resisted.’

2. *Read the preface carefully.* Most people skip the preface ; but we would make the perusal of it the test of an accomplished reader. In it the author

takes us, as it were, into his confidence, and describes to us his motives for writing the book, and his reasons for making it what it is. In this way he awakens our interest, and gives us a foretaste of the volume itself. For example, we are much more deeply impressed with the truthfulness of *Nicholas Nickleby* after we have read in the preface that several Yorkshire schoolmasters claimed to be the original of Squeers, that one meditated raising an action of damages against Dickens, that another was bent upon going to London to cudgel him, and that a third said, 'It must be me, for the character is so like me.' An Italian writer calls the preface the sauce of the book. We would rather liken it to what is called an appetizer.

3. *Take a comprehensive survey of the table of contents.* If the preface is the appetizer, the table of contents is the bill of fare. It gives us a full plan of the feast that is to follow, and enables us to determine what articles we should avoid, and for what articles we should reserve our energies. It is like the map of a journey, showing us through what tracts our way lies, and to what destination it will lead us.

And just as after a journey we find it both pleasant and profitable to reopen the map and trace the road we have come, so after reading a book we may find it advisable to turn back to the table of contents, and find there a complete summary of what we have just been studying.

4. Give your whole attention to whatever you read.

A book is a representation of the best workings of the author's soul. In order to understand it, we must shut out our own circumstances, cast off our own personal identity, and lose ourselves in the writer before us. We must follow him closely through all his lines of thought, understand clearly all his ideas, and enter into all his feelings. Anything less than this is not worthy of the name of reading. That such an abstraction is possible might be shown by many examples. One will suffice. The great Italian poet Dante, on a certain occasion, went to a street to see some grand procession. While he waited for it, he took up a book from a stall, opened it, became interested, then completely absorbed, and did not stir until he had finished it. He awoke as out of a trance, and then ascertained that during his

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moulded after one model, even although that model should be such an admirable person as himself; that such an arrangement might not harmonize with the order of things and the designs of Providence; nay, that it would very likely make the world intolerably dreary and commonplace. Speaking for ourselves, we ~~would~~^{sh} be afraid to prescribe to a miscellaneous audience any list of books beyond a few standard authors such as those already mentioned. No! We would rather say to you: Never adopt as a matter of course the favourite authors of any man. Do not jump about from book to book, trying to read what any would-be judge recommends to you. Do not lose yourself in purposeless, desultory reading to please any man. Your time is precious, and the more precious it is, the more select should your reading be. Carry into your studies the great principle of the division of labour, and confine your attention to that one class of books which suits your capacity best. Make choice of this class of books deliberately and carefully; and in order that you may choose with certainty, let us point out the three characteristics which these books should have. They should (1) interest, (2) call into play the mental

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into play. A book, if it is really a genuine work, is composed of the very substance of the author's spiritual being. There, wrapped up in words and sentiments, lie those thoughts that flashed through his brain, and those feelings that tingled in his heart. There lurks his very soul, ready to start up when occasion calls. Now if, while reading a work, you feel your soul come into contact with his,—if, in other words, you feel yourself drawn towards him, and entering spontaneously into his ideas and sentiments,—then you may conclude that the author is a kindred spirit, and that his book so far suits your capacity. And if the author, like Carlyle or Emerson, scatters through his pages hints of great ideas, which set your mind a-working, and makes it start on a voyage of discovery into the realms of truth, you may conclude that he has one of the most essential qualifications of a great teacher. But even this characteristic is not altogether enough. The book may be a one-sided work, representing the world as a God-forsaken chaos, and man as the victim of pitiless chance, and poisoning the very springs of your being with discontent and scorn. A book, therefore, must have still *another requisite*,

namely, *a tendency to make you fitter for your everyday duties.* The great end of life, after all, is not to think, but to act; not to be learned, but to be good and noble. Accordingly, the crowning merit of a book must always be its practical usefulness. It may be a work of fiction, diverting your thoughts from the chaos of business, and allowing your mind to recover its elasticity and its tone; or a history, bringing before you high examples for your imitation; or a poem, elevating and refining your taste, and filling your imagination with beautiful forms; or the work of a Christian philosopher, rousing you, as with the blast of a trumpet, from self-indulgence to self-sacrifice. If it makes you more cheerful, or more amiable, or more sympathetic, or more appreciative of what is beautiful, or more resolute to follow what is good and noble, then the highest purpose of a book is gained.

These, then, are the three requisites which every suitable book must have. If in any particular class of works you find not one or two but *all* of these three requisites, then you may safely conclude that you have come upon your special line of reading. All you have to do is to follow it perseveringly. The

region into which you have entered may at first seem strange and somewhat dull, but it will always be growing more familiar and more pleasant, until you will feel yourself thoroughly in your element. And do not fear lest you should become contracted in your knowledge. Every line of study must meet and cross some other lines; and thus, while you will be acquiring a particular knowledge of your own department, you will be forming a general knowledge of other departments.

II. We have now seen what books each of us ought to read. Let us now see how we ought to read them.

Different men have different ways of reading books. One man, believing that there is some mystic virtue in the mere printed letters themselves, dozes over a few pages of a volume, and fancies that he gains wisdom by following a plan that is often recommended to those whose brains are perplexed, namely, the plan of 'sleeping upon a subject.' Another, bent upon making a display, charges his mind with some particular information (just as he would charge a musket with shot), and, when the occasion comes,

fires it off, and remains as empty as he was before. Another, a perfect literary glutton, reads books on subjects and in all languages, and burdens his mind with so many facts of different kinds that it reels and vacillates, and is unfit for the particular duties of life. His friends admiringly call him a 'dungeon learning;' and indeed so he is, for everything that comes out of him is musty, and mouldy, and useless. He is, in fact,

‘A bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head.

J. H.

The method of reading that we would recommend is very definite, and consists of several distinct steps:

1. *Before you begin to peruse a book, know something about the author.* When you read a work written by a person you know, you are far more interested in it than in a stranger's book. You imagine you hear him speaking, and you see more many of the allusions than you would otherwise have done. We would therefore advise you to get, if possible, a biographical notice of the writer whom you are about to study. You will thus, as it were, be introduced to him. You will become a

quainted with his life, his character, and the circumstances amid which he composed the book ; and you will therefore read his pages with far more pleasure and intelligence. When we read, for instance, the life of Burns, and see how sorely he was tossed by passion and mischance, what a depth of pathos appears in the following lines :—

‘Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman ;
Though they may gang a kennin’ wrang,
To step aside is human.

‘One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it ;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

‘Who made the heart, ‘tis He alone
Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias.

‘Then at the balance let’s be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What’s done we partly may compute,
But know not what’s resisted.’

2. *Read the preface carefully.* Most people skip the preface ; but we would make the perusal of it the test of an accomplished reader. In it the author

takes us, as it were, into his confidence, and describes to us his motives for writing the book, and reasons for making it what it is. In this way awakens our interest, and gives us a foretaste of the volume itself. For example, we are much more deeply impressed with the truthfulness of *Nicholas Nickleby* after we have read in the preface that seven Yorkshire schoolmasters claimed to be the original Squeers, that one meditated raising an action for damages against Dickens, that another was bent upon going to London to cudgel him, and that a third said, 'It must be me, for the character is so like me.' An Italian writer calls the preface the sauce of the book. We would rather liken it to what is called an appetizer.

3. *Take a comprehensive survey of the table of contents.* If the preface is the appetizer, the table of contents is the bill of fare. It gives us a full plan of the feast that is to follow, and enables us to determine what articles we should avoid, and for which articles we should reserve our energies. It is like the map of a journey, showing us through what terrain our way lies, and to what destination it will lead.

And just as after a journey we find it both pleasant and profitable to reopen the map and trace the road we have come, so after reading a book we may find it advisable to turn back to the table of contents, and find there a complete summary of what we have just been studying.

4. Give your whole attention to whatever you read.

A book is a representation of the best workings of the author's soul. In order to understand it, we must shut out our own circumstances, cast off our own personal identity, and lose ourselves in the writer before us. We must follow him closely through all his lines of thought, understand clearly all his ideas, and enter into all his feelings. Anything less than this is not worthy of the name of reading. That such an abstraction is possible might be shown by many examples. One will suffice. The great Italian poet Dante, on a certain occasion, went to a street to see some grand procession. While he waited for it, he took up a book from a stall, opened it, became interested, then completely absorbed, and did not stir until he had finished it. He awoke as out of a trance, and then ascertained that during his

deep fit of study the procession had passed before him without making the slightest impression upon his senses.

To realize the meaning of an author thoroughly, some old-fashioned people resort to reading aloud. A homely instance of this may be given. The scene is a farmer's ingle on a winter night. A large fire glows in the roomy chimney, and from the mantelpiece hangs a rush-lamp lighting up a group of rustic and good-humoured faces. In the snuggest corner sits the good-man with the county paper in his hand. He is about to get into his brain the account of a monster turnip or the district ploughing match. It is a difficult process, and requires the most delicate handling. He sidles a little in his chair, so that the light may fall directly upon the paper, fixes his glasses upon his nose, knits his brows, puts his forefinger upon the first line, and commanding silence, proceeds. His eyes decipher the words, his tongue pronounces them, they sink through his ears into his head, and when he is done, a self-satisfied smile shows that the difficult operation has been successful, and that the valuable information has been lodged safely in his brain.

5. *Be sure to note the most valuable passages as you read.* Keep a note-book beside you, and jot down as briefly as you please any facts or lines of argument or sentences that strike you. If the keeping of a note-book be a care too harassing for you, then, if the book be your own, write your notes on the margin with a pencil. We might recommend to you a set of signs ; but each one can easily invent for himself a system of marks to denote, as the case may be, that he approves or disapproves of a sentiment, that he doubts or disputes a statement, that he thinks the style clear or obscure, vigorous or commonplace, elegant or clumsy, pathetic or humorous.

Note-taking may thus be done in various ways, but done in some way it must be. Without it you cannot be intelligent readers. For how can you be intelligent without being discriminating ; and how can you be discriminating without distinguishing between the good and the bad, the remarkable and the commonplace ; and how can you distinguish between these without affixing some distinctive marks ? You will find, too, that all great scholars have been great note-takers. They have proved themselves in their

reading as well as in other things men of *mark*.> Locke, Southey, Sir William Hamilton, never read without having their note-books and commonplace books beside them, into which they put, for future use, all the valuable facts and ideas upon which they alighted. Their memories were unusually great and tenacious, but they treated their memories with the utmost consideration. They did not burden and tax and torture them unnecessarily. They used their note-book as a sort of outside palpable memory for holding minute yet important details, which their inner and real memory could not have retained without much wearisome toil.

We may remark, in passing, that long notes are not necessary. Carlyle, in annotating Cromwell's letters, comes to the following interesting passage in one addressed to Richard Mayor, Esquire:—‘Sir, my son had a great desire to come down and wait upon your daughter. I perceive he minds that more than to attend to business here.’ Upon this passage Carlyle writes a note at the foot of the page. It consists of two words, ‘The dog !’ ‘I perceive,’ says Cromwell, ‘that he likes your daughter better than his business.’ ‘The dog !’ adds Carlyle.

6. *Write out in your own language a summary of the facts you have noted.* It is not enough to note several random particulars. These particulars will float about for some time in a disconnected way in your memory, and then be lost. You must arrange them after a method of your own. The arranging of them after your own method will make them more completely your own; the expressing of them in your own words will make them much more clear and definite; and the mere fact of writing them down will fix them more securely in your memory. 'I have always found,' says Grote, 'that to make myself master of a subject, the best mode was to sit down and give an account of it to myself.'

We are quite prepared, however, to hear some objectors say, that in their case the advice is quite impracticable. They have no time; paper and ink are not always at hand; they are slow with the pen, and writing is a difficult and a tedious task. But we are also prepared with a remedy in the shape of an alternative. Accordingly we say, if you cannot write a summary, speak a summary. When you have just read a congenial book and are full of the subject, then try to communicate a clear and correct

account of it to a friend. Of course you must be careful in selecting a suitable friend upon whom to operate. You, just like other people, have among your friends some dull, commonplace persons—kind, good creatures, with better hearts than heads. Now if you inflict your lucubrations upon them, they will be bored, they will vote you a pedant, and they will abandon your company. And you, just like other people, cannot dispense with dull companions. Dull companions are the buffers of society: they prevent the more active and impetuous spirits from coming into collision. They are the shadows of society: they make the lights stand out in greater relief and brilliancy. You must not, therefore, inflict your summaries upon them. Seek rather some kindred spirit, and give him the benefit of what you have read; and you will find that, while you instruct him, you will also make your knowledge more definite to yourself. You will, in fact, discover that this kind of teaching, like charity,

‘Is twice blessed,
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.’

This habit is one of the reasons why some men appear to have wonderful memories. Whatever they

hear or read they tell to every one they meet, and thus it never leaves their minds. They are, in fact, like ambitious and persistent schoolboys, who impress a lesson on their memory by going about and insisting upon saying it to every member of the household.

7. *Apply the results of your reading to your everyday duties.* You have all seen a father teaching his boy to walk. Placing his hands beneath his armpits and supporting him, he trails him slowly along, while the little fellow strikes out his uncertain legs in mimic walking. This is a most useful exercise, and does much to strengthen and direct the soft and pliant limbs; but if nothing else is done, the child will *remain* a child. He must by and by separate himself from his parent's guidance, stand upon his own footing, and, profiting by the imitative exercise through which he has gone, step out boldly and go forth into the world to do his little duties. Very like this infant is the reader of books. When he is reading, he is really using the minds of the authors he is studying. They support his mind and carry it along, making it go through all their own processes. This develops his mental energies; but if nothing

else is done, he will remain a mere baby in intellect. He must, in course of time, make himself independent of any authors. He must think for himself. He must imitate, not so much their words or even their thoughts, as their manner of thinking. He must apply to his everyday duties those qualifications which have made them so great—thorough appreciation of everything true and beautiful, an anxiety to take a complete view of every subject, a habit of methodizing thoughts, and a power of clear and accurate expression. He must prove himself, after his intercourse with the great souls of the past, to be clearer in head, larger in heart, and nobler in action. This, indeed, is the great end to be achieved by books. But if they make man a mere bookworm, they are little else than waste paper; and the majority of them, after undergoing some chemical process, might, during a dearth of coals, be used to enlighten and cheer society after a new fashion. No grander instance of the humanizing influence of literature can be found than Sir Walter Scott. Not only did he possess a genius which lit up his native country and attracted the gaze of dwellers in distant parts of the earth, and gave a new charm to every-

thing Scottish, but in his capacious memory he carried boundless stores of literary information. Now, all this fame and knowledge, instead of making him haughty and distant, only ripened the innate virtues of his character, and made him more sympathetic, more sociable, more genial, more grandly simple. Lord Cockburn says that, when he visited him at Abbotsford in 1828, the simplicity of his character was almost incredible. It was almost as wonderful as his matchless genius.

We have now tried to answer the two great questions: What are we to read? and how are we to read? and have laid down a clear and distinct plan for reading. But after all, it is very likely that you may see two difficulties in the way of following out this plan.

Some may say, 'What about desultory reading? Should we not take up a newspaper, or magazine, or amusing book, and glance over it?' By all means; such an exercise is very pleasant, and may be very useful. It refreshes us after hard work, and helps to restore the tone of our mind. It may even do more. Mr. Boffin grew rich by sifting dust-heaps; and you may (if you follow a method) become wise by skim-

ming over gossipy literature. But do not call the exercise *reading*. Rather call it *recreation*. It bears the same relation to reading that the walnuts after dinner do, to the solid roast and boiled that have gone before.

Some, too, may say, 'It is impossible to read according to such a rigid rule. Perusing biographies and prefaces, making notes, drawing out summaries—who could be bothered with all that?' To this we reply, that you have just two alternatives between which to choose. If you are lazy and listless—if you have no desire to become wiser and better—if, in other words, you are dolts and simpletons, then you will continue to doze and dream over whatever books come to hand, and will remain ignorant for evermore. But if you are active and earnest—if you wish to succeed in life—if you covet the title of rational creatures—if you have the sense to appreciate a good advice and the resolution to carry it out—then you will read according to a well-defined and rigid method.

But while *all* good books have these merits, and should be studied by those methods which we have described, each *class* of books has its own special

characteristics, and its own special ways of being studied. What these are we will now proceed to describe. And in treating of the various great departments of literature, we will not attempt to ~~will~~ arrange them according to a natural order. We will rather take them in the order of their popularity.





CHAPTER II.

WORKS OF FICTION.

MAN comes into the world the most helpless of creatures. He is little else than a soft, sprawling, squalling piece of flesh. How is it possible that he will manage to survive in this bustling, jostling world, where his fellow-creatures will thrust him aside, and the mysterious powers of nature lie in wait on every side, ready to crush him? How will he know how to act amid so many difficult and perplexing circumstances? God has provided for this. A craving has been given to him which will never let him rest, but which compels him to seek the very things necessary for his guidance through life. This craving is an irrepressible desire to know what others are doing, to add to his own experience the experience of others. And he does not wish to know them in the



HENRY FIELDING.

The Highways of Literature p. 38.



abstract, but in the concrete ; not so much what they are, but what they are doing. And if he cannot see them undergoing adventures in reality, he wishes to see them in imagination. He wishes, in other words, to hear a narrative. This desire, too, continues all his life. 'Tell me a story,' lisps the infant almost as soon as he is able to speak. 'Commend me to an exciting novel,' says the young man. 'Anything new ? What is going on ?' asks the man of middle age.

Now, if things were as they ought to be, history and biography should suffice to satisfy this craving. But history treats of great political events, and biography of great geniuses, and the majority of people care little for either of these. Like draws to like. They prefer ordinary occurrences and ordinary people ; and if they cannot get them real, they must have them imaginary. The historian, therefore, is thrust aside and the novelist called in.

In doing this, people cannot be said to be casting away the true and preferring the false. The circumstances of a novel, which after all are not essential, may be imaginary ; but the description of the rise and progress of the action, which is the substance of

the novel, may be real. Who shall dare to say that that most touching of all fictitious narratives, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is not true? The feeding of the swine and the eating of the husks are fanciful; but the incident of the infatuated boy eagerly seizing his patrimony and spending it among debauchees, and coming back a beggar to be forgiven and taken to his father's bosom, is, alas! too true. It is still occurring every day.

Fiction, therefore, has been invented and cultivated to supply the wants of man, and is a necessary, just like tea and coffee or any other nutritious stimulant; and true to its character, it varies its form to suit the circumstances and tastes of each period of life. If we examine, we shall find that the circumstances of each stage of a man's life have led to the production of a kind of fiction exactly suited to them. The story-tellers have taken into account the different periods of a man's mental growth, and without sacrificing truthfulness in any case, have produced a story to suit each period.

A child has little experience, and lives in a world of wonder. Its little eyes are always wide open with astonishment, and it sees everything through

a sort of *glamour*. Big strangers seem giants. Unseen friends who send gifts are fairies. Cats, dogs, and even dolls, are intelligent beings, and could speak if they liked. The most complicated actions seem to be done by magic. Accordingly, the teller of *a child's story* must study these peculiarities. Everything he introduces must be strikingly simple, and at the same time wonderful. The naughty characters are great, big giants like Blunderbore and Cormoran, and the heroes are very diminutive champions like Hop-o'-my-thumb and Jack the Giant-Killer. The good people are all very, very good, and the bad people are all very, very bad. Complicated processes in making things are dispensed with. Everything is done by magic. When Cinderella wants an equipage, there is no difficulty about it. By the touch of her godmother's wand, a pumpkin is changed into a carriage, mice into horses, lizards into footmen, a rat into a coachman; and all these proceed to do their work with the perfect precision and coolness of old hands.

But the child soon becomes a boy, and is sent out into the rough world, where all the nonsense about giants and fairies is soon knocked out of him.

A reckless activity now becomes his characteristic. He develops an astonishing talent for mischief, which *he* calls *fun*. He catapults sparrows, and cannot see 'a harmless, necessary cat,' without stooping down and groping for a stone. He has frequent fights and adventures with certain individuals of his own age, whom *he* calls 'cads.' He also assiduously cultivates practical joking, with a satisfaction to himself in which his nearest relatives do not *always* share. To suit this hopeful young gentleman, the story-teller changes his hand and writes a *boy's novel*. Its elements are adventure, fighting, and mischief. The receipt for its composition is very simple. Take a boy or young man for hero. Let him run away to sea. Wreck him on the coast of Africa, and land him among hordes of grinning negroes. Give him no end of fights, and hairbreadth escapes, and moving accidents by flood and field. Then, with a company of faithful blacks, let him penetrate into the interior, where he finds the biggest game in the world, and where he blazes away to his heart's content at buffaloes, lions, elephants, and hippopotamuses. And all through, let there be with him, as a humble but

favourite attendant, a genuine, hearty British tar,—a sort of salt-water Sam Weller,—always ready to play practical jokes upon the natives, and to be hale and hilarious under the most pressing circumstances. This is the boy's novel; and the boy, clutching it in one hand and a piece of buttered bread in the other, and devouring both simultaneously, is soon fascinated by the story, and pronounces it, in his own particular dialect, to be 'awfully jolly.'

But the days of his boyhood soon pass. His relatives coming to visit him after a year's absence, find that he has shot up into a young man. He discovers the use of a mirror, and gazing into it, gets his first idea of manly beauty. He also forms his notions of the cut of a coat, the colour of a necktie, and the parting of the hair, and adapts his walk and conversation to what he considers a gentlemanly style. He finds, too, that he has a heart, and that he can write poetry, and he frames verses abounding in such rhymes as 'heart,' 'part,' 'ever,' 'sever,' 'never.' The future is enveloped in rose-tint, and he fondly hopes that in that romantic land there will be in store for him nothing but beauty and bliss. For this emotional young man *the sentimental novel* is pro-

duced. Its elements are beauty, devotion, danger, deliverance. Its favourite characters are : a young lady, exquisitely lovely, with golden locks, and the figure of a sylph ; a young man of slim form, bright eyes, and raven hair, who adores the sylph, but is in despair, because, alas ! he has no blue blood in his veins ; a little, rickety aristocrat, who offers a title and a fortune for the hand of the sylph, and a cruel, cruel father who favours the rickety aristocrat. All these characters are at sixes and sevens through the greater part of the book. Then, lo ! a sudden catastrophe—a conflagration, or inundation, or both. The youth of the raven hair rushes in at the risk of his life and saves the sylph. Then that philanthropic, middle-aged man, so frequent in novels and so rare in real life, whose sole business it is to make young people happy, comes in at the very nick of time, and by means of some paper found somewhere, proves that the youth of the raven hair is the eldest son of Sir Somebody, and that his blood, after all, is of the proper regulation colour. ' You have saved her life ; she is yours, take her, and be happy,' says the father, now no longer cruel. And then there is added just one sentence more to say how happy they were to

the end of a long life ; for in the sentimental world all miseries end with marriage, and the rest of life is one delightful monotony of unmitigated bliss.

But the man gradually emerges from the sentimental world into the sober world of reality. His heart has subsided to a humdrum beat. The rose colour has died out. Beauty and bliss may have come, but they have come very much alloyed. Now, if the man is of a shallow nature, he falls into a weaker state than ever. Simple enjoyments pall upon him. He becomes *blase*, and nothing in the real world interests him, save such exciting causes as steeple-chases, fighting and games of hazard. It is to administer to this mind diseased that the novelist prepares his *sensational novel*. Its elements are mystery, murder, detection. The great essential is a culprit. And to make this culprit as interesting as possible, she is a lady as exquisite as an angel, with sunny locks and eyes of heavenly blue, entrancing smile, melodious voice, and small soft delicate hand, the idolized wife of a baronet, yet bearing about with her a guilty secret. And to torment this lovely culprit there is an accomplice, a woman with waxen face, white eyebrows, and colourless lips ; and this

woman has a husband, a red-haired, bull-necked ruffian, who is constantly making himself tipsy, and almost blurting out the secret. Then to get up the hunt, a relation of the baronet comes in, and he suspects the lady's crime, and sets himself to find it out. A detective is put on the scent, and the chase becomes exciting. He schemes hard to get some papers. She destroys them before he can get them. He, after most intricate inquiries, gets other evidence. She sets fire to a house, and tries to burn up both him and the evidence. At last he brings her to bay. She confesses that she has been married before, that she drowned her first husband in a well, that she has a taint of madness in her blood, that she has been mad all the while; and is carried off raving to the asylum. Then, to the surprise of all, her murdered husband turns up. He *had* been thrown into a well, but had scrambled out again, and had lain hid, disgusted with the whole affair. We do not wonder at his disgust.

But if the man is of a deeper nature, when his romantic ideas vanish, a far wider and truer theory of life succeeds. He now sees that the real world is more wonderful than the ideal, that truth is stranger

than fiction; and he becomes interested in all the phenomena of this wonderful world, especially in that wonder of wonders, man. It is to meet the wants of this lover of reality that the great English novelists—Richardson, Fielding, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot—have written what is called the *Novel of Manners*.

Such are the various kinds of works of fiction. There are others, but these are what may be called the legitimate kinds. And in the account which we have just given of their origin, we have ascertained that there is a natural demand for fiction; that the demand continues, under different forms, at all periods of a man's life; and that the books which supply this demand may be held to be necessities of existence.

This consideration, we can easily see, has a very important bearing upon the practical question: how novel-reading should be treated? We can now see how useless it is to tell young people not to read novels at all. As long as they have imagination, as long as that imagination cannot be fully satisfied by history and biography, so long must they continue to read them. Instead of trying to proscribe novel-reading, the only practicable plan is to regulate it,

to show how novels should be used, and to point out the remedies in the cases in which they are abused. This we now proceed to do.

Novels should be used, *in the first place, to teach human character.* This, after all, is their great purpose. And what an important subject it is that they take up! Of all earthly subjects, surely it is the grandest. The inferior animals, the plants, and the material forces of Nature, are wonderful; but as far as our knowledge goes, 'man is the noblest work of God.' 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!' What a grand subject, therefore, human nature is! But the subject is not only grand, it is also useful in the highest degree. Besides our duty to God, we owe a duty to ourselves and a duty to others. But we cannot do our duty to ourselves and others, unless we know ourselves and others, unless we know, in other words, human character. Now, besides the Holy Scriptures, which are the highest exponents of the secrets of the human heart, there

are several kinds of books whose business it is to describe human nature. The most pretentious of these are histories and biographies. But histories and biographies tell us chiefly about great men, and it is not about them we want to know. We want to know about everyday people like ourselves, who are placed very much in the same circumstances, who are tempted in the same way, and who may be models or warnings to us. Now, this is the knowledge that the true novelist undertakes to give us. He presents to us a life-like picture of this bustling work-a-day world, with its interesting scenes and incidents. There he shows us a variety of characters, all playing their appropriate parts. We see not only the outward movements, but also the inner workings of their nature. We watch the motives rising in their hearts, going out into action, and ending in most momentous results. We observe, too, how easily vice springs up, with what difficulty virtue is maintained, how selfishness always ends in degradation, and how benevolence is its own reward. Take Thackeray as an example. We hold that Thackeray—the keen, satirical, warm-hearted, tender, true, pure-minded Thackeray—is one of the greatest educators

which this country has produced. There is no doubt that he is one of the most truthful delineators of human nature. The only objection brought against him is that, in his early works especially, he is too apt to dwell upon the dark side of things. But this, instead of being an objection, is one of his most valuable qualifications as an educator of youth. The young and inexperienced are prone enough of their own accord to look upon the *bright* side. Their animal spirits, aspirations, fresh fancies, all lead them in this direction. It is the *dark* side of the world, with its flatteries, hollow promises, disgusting selfishness, and plotting villainy, that they are in danger of overlooking. Now, Thackeray, side by side with scenes that are bright with the smiles of innocent children, the devotion of noble women, and the wit and wisdom of true-hearted men, has depicted the haunts of fashion in colours that can never fade. He brings before us the Vanity Fair of London, and shows us its parks, its streets, its clubs, its theatres, its ball-rooms, all bustling with the votaries of pleasure. Unlike most other novelists, he does not engross our attention with only a few persons. Away in the background are many less important people

whom he has not time to describe, but whose character he merely indicates by characteristic names. There are, for example, the friend of George IV., the Earl of Portansherry ; a prosy talker, Mr. Jawkins ; a wearisome old woman, Lady Hum-and-haw ; and a German pianist, Herr Thumpenstrumpff. And in the foreground there are some whom he describes far more fully with the most striking effect. Take as specimens the following group of pleasure-hunters of very different kinds. We both see and hear them speak. There is light-hearted, frolicsome Harry Foker. At school he had been dull and dirty, had been unable to spell, and scarcely able to read. But he has developed all at once into a full-blown man of fashion, with a bull-dog's head for a pin, bull-dog's heads for buttons, and sporting scenes ornamenting his shirt front. At the University he prosecutes his education by painting his tutor's door vermillion, and is rusticated for it. Then he thinks of completing his education abroad. 'It don't matter,' said Foker, talking over the matter with Pen ; 'a little sooner or a little later, what is the odds ? I should have been plucked for my little-go again, I know I should ; that Latin I cannot screw into my head, and my mamma's

anguish would have broke out next term. The governor will blow like an old grampus, I know he will,—well, we must stop till he gets his wind again. I shall probably go abroad and improve my mind with foreign travel. Yes, *parly voo's* the ticket. It's, and that sort of thing. I'll go to Paris and learn to dance and complete my education.' There is Joseph Sedley, 'a very stout, puffy man, in buckskins and Hessian boots, with several immense neckcloths that rise almost to his nose, with a red-striped waistcoat and an apple-green coat, with steel buttons almost as large as crown pieces.' He is an Indian official home on sick leave ; but during the Waterloo campaign, when it is thought that there will be no fighting, he goes across to Belgium with the English army, dressed in a frock-coat, duck trousers, and a foraging cap ornamented with a small gold band, and swaggers about, and talks loudly of the absurdity of thinking that 'Boney,' as he calls him, will ever attempt to face them. But no sooner does he hear that 'Boney' is approaching than he sheds his military attire, shaves off his moustache, buys a horse at an exorbitant price, and is off, leaving his friends behind him. Yet, when he returns to India, he talks of nothing

but the campaign of 1815, goes into all the details, leaves the impression that he must have been by the side of the Duke of Wellington on the eventful day, and in general identifies himself so much with the battle that he goes by the name of 'Waterloo Sedley.' Then there is that profligate yet most amusing waif, Captain Costigan, in faded and somewhat shiny garments, with red nose, a wisp of hair, like well-withered hay, on each side of his head; a hat cocked very much over one eye, and a pervading flavour of 'poteen.' In a rich Irish brogue he drivels about 'me daughter,' blarneys those who are likely to lend him money, and brags about his acquaintance even with royalty. 'Faith, sir,' said he, 'the bullion's scarcer with me than it used to be, as is the case with many a good fellow. I won six hundred of 'em in a single night, sir, when me kind friend, His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, was in Gibralthar.' Then there is Major Pendennis, the inimitable specimen of an aristocratic toady. He is got up for the purpose in shiny hat, rich brown head of hair, unrumpled cravat, coat without a crease, and spotless linen and gloves. The gods of his idolatry are the Upper Ten Thousand, and to sit at their banquets

and bask in their heavenly society he would lick the very dust. But when there is no blue-blooded divinity at hand to worship, he will truckle to any one, however vulgar, who will give him a good dinner. 'That is the benefit of knowing rich men ;—I dine for nothing, sir ;—I go into the country, and I'm mounted for nothing. Other fellows keep hounds and gamekeepers for me. *Sic vos non vobis*, as we used to say at Grey Friars, hey ? I'm of the opinion of my old friend Leech of the Forty-fourth ; and a devilish good, shrewd fellow he was, as most Scotchmen are. Gad, sir, Leech used to say, " He was so poor that he couldn't afford to know a poor man." ' These and such as these are the characters which Thackeray describes to the life ; and they prove themselves to be life-like by the fact that they still live amid all changes in the memory of the English-reading public. No force could put them down. The British Parliament with all its boasted power could not suppress Harry Foker. The Russian army with its countless battalions could not rout that veteran campaigner, Captain Costigan. And we hold that in photographing such trifling profligates, toadies, and misleaders of youth, Thackeray has done a far

greater service than if he had sketched thoroughly respectable people of the *namby-pamby* sort. Nay, he has acted a fatherly part. When a father is sending his son forth into the world, who are the men he is careful to describe to him ? The good ? No, the bad—the idlers, debauchees, and blacklegs that lie in wait for the unwary. We can suppose the case of a rich youth. He has few friends ; but before being launched into the world he reads Thackeray, and becomes acquainted with the likenesses of those that are sure to tempt him. He is forewarned, and when he goes forth and encounters those who are bent on his destruction, he recognises them and is able to escape them.

Good novels, in the *second* place, give recreation. The body sometimes, through overwork, becomes weak and jaded. When this happens, a sojourn in the country is recommended ; and the change of scene, new places, new persons, and gentle exercise soon restore the physical powers to their wonted health. In the same way, the mind is often harassed and weakened by its own anxious thoughts. It cannot still them, and they set upon it, and attack it and worry it almost to madness. Now, under these

circumstances, a good novel is to the mind what a country sojourn is to the body. It is true that there are other remedies which need not be mentioned here, but this, too, is a genuine remedy. By the force of its charm, it carries us away from our tormenting thoughts, interests us with new scenes, incidents, and characters, calls the faculties of our mind and the affections of our hearts into gentle exercise, and thus restores our health and happiness.¹ We have said that the novelist is an educator. We now say that he is a physician, well qualified to cure certain diseases of the mind, to dispel the vapours, to restore the tone and elasticity of the spirits, and to nerve us once more for the duties of life. Look, for example, at the incalculable amount of happiness that one novelist, Charles Dickens, has given to the human race. We refer not to his wonderful powers of conducting a story, sketching original characters, satirizing social abuses, or wielding the highest gift of all, namely, that of poetic imagination. We only

¹ When Carlyle, in the process of writing the *French Revolution*, found that his first volume had been burnt by mistake, and that it must needs be re-written, he read Marryat's novels for three weeks to restore his equanimity.—*Reminiscences*.

refer to his joyous humour. Surely never had travellers into the realms of fiction such an exhilarating guide ! What an overflow of the finest animal spirits, what floods of sunny geniality, and what an inexhaustible sympathy with everything good and true ! With what intense delight does he dwell upon the varying scenes in nature—the luxuriant foliage of summer, the frosty roads of winter, a little hamlet dozing in the sun, a ship at sea battling with the winds and waves ! With what relish does he dive into the busy haunts of men, and take an interest in all their pleasures and amusements ! In what a tender and appreciative way does he point out the many estimable qualities that lurk under the rough and mean appearance of the poor man—his patience, his contentment, his love for his wife and children, and for the innocent pleasures of his home ! When will the world ever forget that Christmas dinner at Bob Cratchit's, where all the members took part in preparing it, where 'Mrs Cratchit made the gravy ready beforehand in a little saucepan hissing hot ; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour ; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce ; Martha dusted the hot plates ; Bob took tiny

Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and, mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped'? Even the most commonplace objects catch a brightness from Dickens as he passes by. A portrait he calls 'the coloured shadow of a man.' The houses of London he represents as 'peppered with smoke.' A heavy door in an old rambling building is represented as 'firing a long train of thundering reverberations.' Copperfield's bed in the inn was 'an immense fourposter, which was quite a little landed estate.' The pockets of the Artful Dodger were so large that they seemed to undermine his whole suit of clothes. A certain dragoon was so tall that 'he looked like the afternoon shadow of somebody else.' Trotty Veck's mittens had 'a private apartment only for the thumb, and a common room or tap for the rest of the fingers.' Roger Riderhood had 'an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangy, and that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.' See also how much he can make of an old mat:—'Being

useless as a mat, it had for many years directed its industry into another channel, and tripped up every one.' And what a charm he throws around even his most insignificant characters! He has been accused of caricaturing them and making too much of them. But what, after all, does this matter? This habit just arises from his love for the children of his brain, and his desire to make other people like them. In the outburst of his genial humour he pulls them about, puts them into the most amusing attitudes, and makes them appear under the most unexpected similitudes. Take a few examples. Some are remarkable for their appearance. We have—Dora's aunts, 'not unlike birds altogether, having a sharp, brisk, sudden way of adjusting themselves like canaries;' the apoplectic Major Bagstock, 'with a complexion like a Stilton cheese, and eyes like a prawn's, and who not only rose in the morning like a giant refreshed, but conducted himself at breakfast like a giant refreshing;' 'the gawky fisher lad, Ham, whose trousers were so stiff that they could have stood alone, and who did not exactly wear a hat, but was covered in atop, like an old building, with something pitchy;' Captain Cuttle, every inch a

sailor, with a handkerchief twisted round his neck like a rope, a large shirt-collar like a small sail, and a glazed hat so hard that it made your very head ache to look at it; the old sailor in the lighthouse, 'with his face as damaged and scarred with hard weather as the figurehead of an old ship, and who struck up a sturdy song that was like a gale;' a genuine tar by the name of Blogg, 'a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oilskin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beach when the tide is out;' Bill Sykes, whose bulky legs always appeared 'in an unfinished and incomplete state, without a set of fetters to garnish them;' a prize-fighter named the Game Chicken, 'whose face bore the marks of having been frequently broken and but indifferently mended;' and shabby-genteel Tony Jobling, the rim of whose hat 'had a glistening appearance as if it had been a favourite promenade for snails.' Other characters are distinguishable by some peculiarity in their disposition. There is Pecksniff, the very ideal of a hypocrite, 'like a direction post always pointing out the road to virtue and never going there himself.' There is Miggs, a gaunt servant-of-all-

work, who imagines that she is soaring to the very height of Christian charity when she exclaims, 'I hopes I hates and despises both myself and all my fellow-creeturs.' Then there is Joe Willet, the stolid landlord of the Maypole, who can never *think* unless he is basking before a roaring fire, whose head, in fact, requires to be cooked before it will let out any ideas. There is also the immortal Micawber, threadbare, poverty-stricken, helplessly in debt; but always great and glorious, when he describes his misery in grandiloquent words and long-resounding sentences.

When we think of the vast amount of innocent enjoyment which we ourselves have derived from Dickens' works; and when we multiply this amount by the millions of people who read these works in all parts of the world, we are lost in astonishment at the incalculable addition to the sum of human happiness which one man has been destined to make. His humour has, indeed, been one of the best tonics ever invented, and he himself one of the great benefactors of the human race.

Novels, in the *third* place, teach history. The novelist is really a historian of the motive and

actions of men and of the manners of his own age. But he also sometimes goes back to bygone ages, into the region of history proper ; and this, in our opinion, he does legitimately. Partly from lack of materials, and partly from a deficiency in imaginative power, the historian proper, as a rule, has not been successful in making this region interesting to the general public. It is a misty, colourless, lifeless land. The student is very soon involved in endless tangles of political intrigues and military manœuvres. The great characters flit before him like ghosts, formless and silent ; and there are no everyday people like himself in whom he can take an interest. Now, the historical novelist undertakes to remedy this defect. He sheds the light of his fancy on this dim land. He chooses the most striking of the political intrigues and manœuvres, and mingles them with tales of private life and adventure. He gives form and soul and colour to the great men ; and to make them more life-like, he associates with them a number of ordinary mortals, the creations of his own imagination. In fact, he imparts to the whole region, which was only a shadow before, an appearance of reality. Look, for instance, at what Sir Walter Scott has done

for Scottish history. Before his time, with the exception of the parts relating to Wallace and Bruce, and Queen Mary, it may be said to have been unknown. It was a confused conglomeration of antiquarian relics in the midst of which nobody, save Dr. Dryasdust, could live. Passing among these remains, the genius of Scott stirred the dry bones and made them live. In his novels we see old Scotland revivified. He has built up the old castles. He has filled the old suits of armour with living beings of real bone and muscle. Those ghosts of dead warriors that hover over the well-fought fields he has caused to take form and to fight, and to taste again the wild delights of battle. He has made the more notable Scots of old—the Stuart kings, Mary, Regent Murray, Montrose, Claverhouse, Argyll—walk out of their portrait frames, and move, and talk, and act; and he has surrounded them with imaginary characters so varied, so palpable, so racy of the soil, that they throw an atmosphere of reality over the whole. Scott's sketches of these historical characters may be considered by extremely fastidious critics as incorrect, but they have at least this merit, that they are life-like.

Such are the ways in which novels may be used. But throughout the world there is a countless number who abuse them. They are of both sexes and of all ages; and though they may be men and women in appearance, in mind they are mere children. None of their mental faculties has been developed save their curiosity. 'A story, a story,' is all they require to amuse their childish intellect and to kill time. Sometimes they alight upon a good novel; but their minds are so feeble that they cannot digest it. The characters pass through their intellect without leaving any impression. 'They come like shadows, and so depart.' But generally the novels which they read are of the namby-pamby order, or of that kind called sensational, whose characteristics are murder, mystery, and wicked intrigue. If they are namby-pamby, reading them is like sipping jelly water. If they are sensational, they are like Mrs. Squeers' posset of brimstone and treacle. In both cases they destroy the mental appetite and make it loathe all solid food.

Now what is the cure for this lamentable condition? How is novel-reading to be reduced to a minimum? We cannot have a censor of works of

fiction to prohibit the publication of all those that are objectionable. We might prescribe certain tests by which worthless books might be detected; but the majority of readers would not take the trouble to apply the tests, and even if they did, by that time the objectionable works (if they *were* objectionable) would have been read and the evil would have been done. The only cure is to do what physicians do in so many cases of bodily weakness, namely, to raise the general tone of the system. We would propose, therefore, when the patients are young, to stimulate and elevate the tone of the mental system. This we would do in three ways:

1. We would cultivate the imagination of young people when they are at school. We would say to the teacher: The remedy of this great evil of indiscriminate novel-reading is in your hands. Get rid of the notion that the human mind is a mere bag to be filled with knowledge. Get rid of the notion that a boy is an ingenious automaton, that may be made to go through certain motions to please Her Majesty's Inspector at the end of the year. Recollect that he has an imagination that is hungering to be fed

with stories about his fellow-beings. Develop and nourish this faculty with narratives from history, biography, and general literature. Do not be content with giving (as is generally done) the mere husks of the subject—names and dates. Give him the very kernel, the very spirit. Throw your whole being into the subject, place yourself in fancy among the circumstances you are describing; be, for the time, the character you are representing, and make the whole lesson as life-like as possible. If you can do this, your success is certain. Surely there is enough of thrilling incidents in history, surely there is enough of striking characters in biography, surely there is enough of delightful passages in English literature, to charm the very dullest intellect.

2. But if this plan does not succeed, and if young people will still read novels indiscriminately, there is still another remedy in reserve. We should meet novel-readers on their own ground. We should say, 'Well, if you will insist upon reading novels, we will read them along with you.' We should invite them to hear a course of lectures on the chief novelists of the present century. The lecturer,

besides having a thorough grasp of the subject, should not be a dry man, but should be able to make everything he touches clear and interesting. Taking up each of the principal novels in turn, he should tell the plan graphically and vividly, describe the principal characters dramatically, bring out the individuality of each, read illustrative extracts, and point out the merits and defects of each work. If this were done properly, young people would scarcely fail to appreciate standard works of fiction, and appreciating them, would not fall back upon those that are worthless.

'Could they on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor.'

Give an ass the run of a clover field, and he will wish no longer to feed upon thistles.

3. There is still another remedy. Young people should never be allowed to idle away their time. Idleness is the soil from which almost every wickedness grows. When we are idle, both our bodies and our minds soon become morbid. Being morbid, we look at everything and everybody with a

jaundiced eye; and the people of everyday life seem insipid, tiresome, and even hateful. We take refuge in novels, and devote our interest and our affections to the shadowy beings of an ideal world. The disease grows with what it feeds on, and the result is unhealthy sentiment and passion, which not infrequently end in scandalous deeds. To all young people, therefore, we ~~would~~ ^{say} say: Have something to do. Whether you are rich or poor, have some useful employment. And let it be some fixed task which you cannot shirk at a moment's notice. Carlyle compares the work of this world to an immense hand-barrow with innumerable handles, of which there is one for every human being. But there are some people, he says, so lazy that they not only let go their handle, but they jump upon the barrow and increase the weight. Don't let go *your* handle. There is abundance of work in this busy world for every one who has a human heart.



CHAPTER III.

BIOGRAPHY.

ABOUT the year 1725, in a wood near Hamelin, in Germany, a wild human being was descried by some hunters. It was a boy, seemingly about fifteen years of age. He was naked, ran swiftly on his hands and feet, swung himself from tree to tree like a monkey, and devoured moss and grass. He was caught and brought to England, but he tore off the clothes that were put on him, and preferred to devour his food raw. He was placed by the King under the tuition of the great scholar and wit, Dr. Arbuthnot; but although he lived till he was seventy, he never learned to talk. This hapless solitary, known in literature as Peter the Wild Boy, is a striking instance of humanity sunk to the level of the brutes.

Such would be the deplorable state of every one

of us if left to ourselves; but God has arranged that we should be endowed with the gifts and graces of those who have gone before us.

In the first place, we participate in the blessings of our relatives and friends. We are surrounded from infancy with soft hands, gentle voices, and ✓ smiling faces. We are mimetic creatures, and imitate naturally what we see and hear; and we unconsciously adopt the language, the manners, and the ideas of those around us. In this way we inherit the accumulated experience of our ancestors.

But this is not all, God has not only arranged that we should inherit the accumulated wisdom of ✓ our ancestors, but He has arranged that we should inherit, if we choose, the accumulated wisdom of the whole human race. This is a startling statement, but is it true? How can we grasp the wide illimitable ocean of human ideas? We cannot come into contact with even a few thousands of individuals; and even if we could, the varied experience of the few thousands would utterly confound us. There is nothing so perplexing as a crowd of people all very much alike. The plan by which this can be done is simple. We have only to study

the lives of great men, their biographies. A great man, owing to his wonderful powers of mind and heart, masters, to a certain extent, all the knowledge and resources of his own time. Whatever is peculiar and striking, is appropriated by him. He is the embodiment of his age, the model, the representative man. And his deeds and words are so remarkable and memorable, that they are recorded for the benefit of all time to come. In this way, when we master the lives of the great men of a country, we are virtually possessing ourselves of the excellence and wisdom of *all* the men of that country. They are the centres, the *foci* into which all the virtue of the land is gathered.

This, then, is the use of great men. They are intended to collect the scattered wisdom of the people, to embody it in living human action and words, and to make it palpable to all. They are thus wonderful and necessary contrivances, ingeniously designed for our use by an all-bountiful God. Some of them, in the rude jostling of the world, may have been strained and injured; yet still they are all God's gifts, and intended for our benefit. And indeed, as a rule, mankind are not slow to use these gifts, or what are

supposed to be these gifts. There are few characteristics more marked than mankind's propensity to follow leaders either real or imaginary. They have a very strong tendency to fall into herds or flocks, to drift along, led, if not through the intelligence, through the eye, or by the ear, or even by the nose. They have been most appropriately compared to sheep, ever ready to follow in a body some bell-wether. With their silly heads low down, and all turned in the same direction, on they trot after him, doing whatever he does. If a stick is held up before him, and he leaps over it, and the stick is then removed, it does not matter. They leap too. On they go, one after another, bounding through the air, and shaking their foolish tails in triumph as if they had surmounted a real barrier.

We have now seen that great men are necessary, and that other men are designed to follow them. The most important question now is, How can we discover these great men? How can we distinguish between false greatness and real greatness? This, you will easily see, is a most important question, one of the most important that could be asked. On it depends the very destiny of the world. For what

is history but a lamentable account of how nations and sections of nations have been misled to their ruin by false gods, false heroes, false prophets, conquerors, demagogues, and quacks? It is our duty, therefore, to inquire who are the false leaders and who are the true.

Who are the *sham* great men, the tinsel heroes that delude the nations? It would be vain to try to enumerate them all. We can only refer to *three* kinds. In the *first* place, there are those who are called great simply because they have been successful in acquiring power over their fellow-creatures. *Success* is supposed to be greatness. The man may be the most barefaced trickster. He may have risen to his present position by conceit, by unblushing impudence, by lying, by pandering to the folly and superstition of the rabble. It does not matter. There he sits bedizened with the insignia of office, and all the tuft-hunters worship him and call him great. The most wonderful specimen of this kind of abnormal greatness was the first Napoleon. He was the most portentous, the most sublime sham ever developed by the ages. It was indeed marvellous that he, a man of humble rank, should spring by the

sheer force of character into notice, should gain the command of the French armies, and should hurl them like one great fire-belching, thundering tornado, to and fro across the continent of Europe, till mighty kingdoms were devastated, and old thrones were over-set, till he loomed large before the eyes of all men, and the whole world could think of nobody and talk of nobody but Napoleon. But after all he was not a *great man*. There was scarcely a spark of humanity in him. The being who could coolly sacrifice the lives of thousands and the happiness of millions, who could stop the trade and industry of the globe, merely that his vanity might be pampered, was not a man at all. Some would call him a demon. But we would compare him to an ogre. He was indeed like the ogre of the fairy tales. He was abnormally big. There was a dread solitariness about his manner of life. He laid waste vast tracts of country; and he grew and fattened upon the blood of human victims. The world ought to have done with such military ogres who make people their food. People should object to become their food. If they wish such diet, let them feed upon each other. Let them be shut up like the Kilkenny cats to devour each

other, leaving nothing but their tails. The world would be well rid of them.

‘War’s a game which, were their subjects wise,
Kings would not play at.’

In the *second* place, there are those who are called great simply because they make a noise. *Noise* is mistaken for greatness. In these days of political meetings, social meetings, debating societies, those men are constantly lifting up their voices, and the daily newspaper catches their clamour, and prolongs it for one day more. Society, in the good old feudal times, when men helped themselves to everything, and freely knocked each other about the head, was compared to a bear-garden. The bear-garden has now become a barn-yard, where the cackling of the geese and the gabbling of the turkey-cocks drown the cries of the more modest members of the community. You all know a man of this noisy type. A maggoty brain, a ready tongue, and an unspeakable belief in himself, constitute his whole stock-in-trade. With these he keeps society astir. He breaks out in different parts of the country, he meddles with everything, and he attends to everything but his own

business. He fondly fancies that he is one of the heads of the people, but he is only one of the mouths. He imagines that he is famous, but when we see him striding along the street with his nose in the air, and a self-complacent expression in his face, as if he felt that the universe was looking on, and saying to itself, 'There goes the great Mr. So-and-So,' we always think of Mrs. Poyser's dunghill cock, who imagined that the sun rose in the morning for no other purpose than to hear him crow.

‘Man, proud man !
Dressed in a little brief authority,
(Most ignorant of what he’s most assured,
His glassy essence), like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
As make the angels weep.’

In the *third* place, there are those who seem great simply because they *look* great. A man bought a parrot from a sailor on the understanding that it could talk. But he soon found that it could not utter a single word. He complained to the sailor. ‘Can’t talk !’ said the sailor ; ‘no, perhaps not, but look at him—he’s a desperate one to think !’ Some would-be great men are like this parrot. They can’t

talk, or at least, if they do talk, nobody can make out what they mean. But they look as if they could think unutterable things. And just by holding their tongues, and never letting people understand them, and looking unspeakably wise, and bearing themselves as if they were superior beings, they get on in the world. People come to admit their claims to high honours and offices. For mankind at large are so lazy that they cannot be troubled to test a man for themselves, but they generally take him at his own estimate. Shakespeare understood this class of persons, just as he understood every other class of persons :

‘ There are a sort of men, whose visages
Do cream and mantle like a standing-pond :
And do a wilful stillness entertain,
With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit ;
As who should say, “ I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark.” ’

There was once an English lawyer who rose to the highest honours in his profession by means of a wonderfully sapient face. His face was really his fortune. ‘ Nobody,’ said Macaulay, ‘ could be half so wise as my Lord So-and-So looks.’

This is *sham* greatness. But what is *real* great-

ness? This is easily answered. A great man is a large man—large in soul, which is the nobler part of his being. And how does his soul become large? By the simple process of addition. It can go forth out of its own body, come in contact with other souls, and unite them, as it were, to itself. This it does by that wonderful power called sympathy. It is sympathy that makes a man great. A small man has no sympathy. His soul is confined within his own little carcase, and is completely taken up with his own little comforts and his own little ailments. You generally know him by the peering appearance of his eyes, as if he was always looking at some near object. The public estimate such a selfish man properly, for they call him a 'creature' or a 'body,' that is, a mere body, with nothing worthy to be called a soul. But the great soul is not content with its own body. He goes forth and makes his home in the different parts of the universe. He does not cease to be himself; but he enlarges himself so as to include others. By means of observation and reading, he places himself in the circumstances of other human beings. He sympathizes with the people of the present in all countries. He sympathizes with the people of the

past in all ages. And not content with his fellow-men, he descends to the position of the lower animals and plants, and understands and feels even for them. And not content with created beings, he soars, as it were, into sympathy with his Maker, and strives to know and appreciate the wonderful laws by which He rules the world. Grant him only time and means of research, and there is almost no limit to the extension of his being. He lives in imagination in all times and in all countries. He is constantly rising, with reverence be it said, to the omniscience and omnipresence of his Creator.

That this living, active sympathy is the very essence of greatness, can be proved by a memorable instance in history. Nearly two thousand years ago the Jews were waiting for the appearing of the Son of God upon earth. They expected this wonderful deliverer, this Messiah, this God-man to appear as a panoplied king, an omnipotent conqueror, attended by ten thousand thousand warriors, sweeping his foes from off the face of the earth, and establishing the throne of David in Jerusalem for ever. Such was their anticipation. And what was the reality ? A poor man born of an obscure woman, brought up as a

carpenter in an obscure village, and wandering about the country without a place wherein to lay His head. His characteristic was not earthly power or pomp. It was living, active, all-absorbing sympathy—sympathy which overflowed His heart, illumined His countenance, and touched His voice with such a winning tenderness that people exclaimed, 'Never man spake like this Man.' Not once do we ever hear of Him thinking of His own pleasure or His own comfort. His whole being was given up to the love of God, of God's world, and of God's helpless creatures. And this love, like the sunshine, gilded and warmed all 'alike.' He sympathized with all classes, teaching and blessing Jew and Gentile, Pharisee and publican, rich and poor, saints and sinners, old men and little children. He sympathized with the lower animals and with flowers, drawing the most touching lessons from the birds on the house-tops and the lilies in the field. He sympathized, above all, with His heavenly Father, spending whole nights in communion with Him, and at last freely sacrificing His life, that the divine will might be done and the divine purpose carried out.

But sympathy is not only the foundation of

a great character. It is also the necessary cause of every particular great achievement. Great speakers and great doers in each particular movement are inspired by sympathy. They are representative men, and have been influenced by the sentiments and ideas of the people. In other words, they have appropriated the moral and mental force of the people. When they strike, they strike as the hand of the mass; when they speak, they speak as the mouth of the mass; and it is this fact which gives to their speech and to their action such a mighty effect. They are like the foremost men of the Macedonian phalanx. They strike, not with their own strength only, but with the strength of the whole army that is forcing them on from behind. You can easily see this exemplified in everyday life. If a speaker at an assembly is isolated, and feels that he is uttering sentiments peculiar to himself, his speech is comparatively feeble and indecisive. But if he is in thorough sympathy with the audience, and knows that he is expressing their sentiments, he speaks with the power and thrilling effect of a trumpet. It is not he that is speaking. It is the audience lifting up its mighty

voice through him. If a man in a crowd requires to chastise a person for an insult that the crowd knows nothing and cares nothing about, his blow is comparatively weak and ineffective. But if he feels that he is resenting an insult which has been inflicted upon the crowd, and under which the crowd is still writhing, he hits out with the directness and momentum of a thunderbolt. It is not he that strikes. It is the crowd itself, striking down with resistless blow the rash intruder.

You can also see this exemplified in history. Robert Bruce was a brave soldier and a skilful general; but he would not have shown that clear decision and that resistless valour which he showed at Bannockburn, had he not felt that he was the champion of Scotland. The griefs of thousands of oppressed women and children throbbed in his heart, and the ardent desire of thousands of brave men for freedom nerved his arm. He felt within himself the might and courage of the whole nation. He was liberty itself, aiming a deadly blow at tyranny. In such a struggle it would be a great glory even to die :

‘By oppression’s woes and pains,
By our sons in servile chains,
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free !

Lay the proud usurper low,
Tyrants fall in every foe,
Liberty’s in every blow,
Let us do or die !’

It was a memorable day in April 1521 when Martin Luther was summoned before the Diet of Worms to answer for his opinions. He, the poor miner’s son, stood there alone, unbefriended, in the presence of emperor, princes, electors, bishops, nobles, and scholars of Germany. How was it that the obscure priest did not sink down, dazzled and abashed, before the august and hostile assemblage? How was it that he was able to stand up bravely, and in a clear and collected manner to defend his doctrines? It was because he was conscious that he was speaking not for himself alone, but for Christendom, groaning under priestcraft and superstition. It was because he was conscious that he was pleading the cause of the Almighty Himself. The cries of a down-trodden continent, the voice of the Divine Spirit Himself, spake through his

mouth, as he concluded with those memorable words: 'Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, I cannot, and I will not retract. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. May God help me!'

Such, then, is the essence of true greatness, a broad and active sympathy. But we think it right to say, that it is not necessary that this sympathy should be developed equally all round. If it is developed in a strong and healthy manner only in one direction, it still has a claim to the title of greatness. For example, Thomas Edward, the Banff naturalist, was really a great man. In his childhood he was a most unpromising pupil. He would not learn, and he was expelled from school. When he grew up, he was fit for nothing but to cobble shoes. He was, it is true, fond of beasts and birds and fishes, and all manner of creeping things, and spent all his leisure time in studying them, taking long rambles, staying out the whole night, sleeping in caves and holes of the earth, and coming home in the morning with hat and pockets full of specimens both dead and alive. But even this was considered a weakness. His wife said that the only

fault people could charge him with, was his love for the 'basties,' and she did consider this a fault. Yet, when we studied his life, we felt that this was a great man. He had the God-like quality of sympathy with the meanest of living things. He was like the great common Father, who loves and tenderly provides for the most insignificant, and for what are usually considered the most loathsome of His creatures.

In this way great men are constituted. What a noble band they are ! With all their shortcomings, they are the noblest works of God on the face of the earth. His other works, the plants, the animals, the celestial luminaries, show His power, but these show His own likeness. They are like Him in wisdom, but above all in that warm, far-reaching sympathy which embraces every living thing. They are, indeed, the highest, the very flower of all the Almighty's works. They illumine, as it were, both space and time. They have shed a lustre on the earth upon which they have lived ; they have made it far more beautiful to us ; and we cannot visit the hallowed spots of Stratford, Abbotsford, and Rydal Mount, without feeling that such men as Shakespeare,

Scott, and Wordsworth have made the place of their feet glorious. Great men have also lighted up the dark vista of history. There they shine in the abyss of the past, like the fixed stars, that have drawn into themselves, as into centres, all the light and heat scattered through space, and burn there for ever to cheer and guide us.

We have now discovered a test by which we can ascertain whether any particular biography should be studied.

Is the subject of the biography a man of large sympathy, who feels and labours for his fellow-creatures ? If he is so, he is really great, and we shall be benefited by a study of his life.

The great question now is, How should we study these great men in their biographies ? What is the best method by which we can thoroughly understand them ? This is no easy question. It is difficult enough to understand an ordinary man. He is a sealed book, and unless some severe accident happens to force open the leaves of his character, we see only the outside of him. We imagine him thoroughly respectable. He is, let us suppose, temperate and virtuous, a church office-bearer, and even a Sunday-

school teacher. But let a commercial crisis come, and very likely we find we have been mistaken. The man whom we fondly thought a saint, turns out to be a selfish, heartless swindler.

But if it is difficult to understand an ordinary man, even when he is before our very eyes, it is far more difficult to understand an extraordinary man, especially when he is remote in the past, and imperfectly recorded in a book. Yet still it can be done, and in doing so we follow the method that would be used in ordinary life. In ordinary life, what would we do if we wished to know a man thoroughly? We would, if possible, live beside him, and associate with him. We would notice his appearance, his dress, his house, his everyday habits. We would study his demeanour in all the varying scenes of life, in joy and in sorrow, beside his friends and in the presence of his enemies; and we would listen to all his sayings, his careless conversation by the fireside, and his deliberate utterances before the public. And last of all, we would place ourselves, in imagination, in his circumstances, and look at things from his point of view. It is quite true, that all this inquisitiveness might be stigmatized as impertinence;

but still, if we wished to understand the character in question, it would be perfectly necessary. Very much in the same way should we study the biography of a great man. First of all, we should visit, if possible, the places where he lived, for this will give us a far more vivid idea of his career. Then we should master all the details of his life. We cannot be too particular in our inquiries. We should learn about his house, his furniture, his dress, his habits, and his style of conversation. We should peruse his diaries and his letters. If he is an author, we should read his books; if he is an inventor, we should study the plan of his inventions. Then, last of all, we should transport ourselves in fancy to his time and place, and look at things from his point of view; and by taking into account the influences which surrounded him, we should estimate his character correctly. This is the only satisfactory method in which a great man's life can be studied. But some might object to this method by saying: 'It is impossible to get such full and particular information regarding the lives of all the great men.' Very true. But the fact that we cannot study fully the lives of all the great men, is no reason why we should not

study fully the lives of the few. Nay, rather, is it not a reason why we should study the lives of the few all the more? In the English language, we have enough of full and complete biographies to occupy our attention for many years. Have we not long and detailed lives of Johnson, of Scott, of Chalmers, of Byron, of John Sterling, of Dickens, of Kingsley, of Norman Macleod, of Macaulay? Have we not the autobiographies of Gibbon, Burns, Franklin, Haydon, Crabb Robinson, and Carlyle? Have we not also such light biographical gossip as Aubrey's *Lives*, Spence's *Anecdotes*, and the *Table Talks* of Selden, Coleridge, and Rogers? He who studies all these great men, grasping their characters, and appropriating their ideas and their wisdom, will not require to study much more. He need not fear to meet his enemies in the gate.

Let us, in conclusion, refer to the special advantages to be got from the study of biography.

1. The study of biography will cure us of affectation and conceit. Affectation is most debasing and deforming. A creature who spends the most of his time before the mirror, admiring his own

imaginary perfections, cannot fail to shrivel up into something puny and unnatural. Everything that he does is marked by littleness. The steps he takes are little, because he fears to soil his exquisite feet. His mouth becomes little, for he thinks it genteel to pucker it up. His words are little, because he deems it mighty fine to clip them. His ideas are little, because they are about a very little subject, namely himself. Truly affectation is the most unnatural and odious thing under God's heaven ; and Shakespeare makes Hamlet read Ophelia a scathing lesson on the subject : ' God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another ; you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll none on't ; it hath made me mad.'

Now there is no better cure for this affectation than the contemplation of the great. The small, when placed beside the great, will have their smallness made apparent. The strutting, would-be-dignified mannikin, when set side by side with Goliath, will collapse. The dux of the village school, when he comes to understand the complicated and far-reaching calculations of Newton, will value little

his own deftness at ciphering. The local poet, when he has entered thoroughly into the grand conceptions and divine harmonies of Shakespeare and Milton, will take the hoarded newspapers, containing his once-cherished verses, and make a bonfire of them. And so we, when we contemplate great men, will cease to think much about ourselves; and accordingly our conduct, words, and ideas will become free, unaffected, and natural.

2. The study of biography leads us to imitate the grandest models of the human race. We are imitative animals. Everything about us—our manners, our ideas, our language, our accent—has been acquired by imitating those around us. We begin this imitation unconsciously in our very infancy. The little girl in the nursery imitates her mother: keeps house, takes all the household cares upon her little shoulders, cooks dinners, scolds servants, places her doll in the corner, and even whips it for being naughty. The little boy too, simulating his father, throws himself into an easy-chair, puts on his spectacles, reads the newspaper upside down, grumbles, growls, and even swears

after the paternal fashion. We cannot refrain from imitating. It is as natural and unconscious as breathing; and when, in the study of biography, we are, as it were, in the presence of the great and good, we must imitate even unwittingly their noble characteristics. We are in the best company in the world, and we cannot fail to acquire their modes of feeling, thought, and action.

3. In studying the lives of great men, we get the accumulated wisdom of the past. In plainer language, we get a knowledge of history. There was once an old Grecian king named Danaus. He had fifty daughters, and forty-nine of these in one night murdered their husbands. For this, after death, they were condemned in the infernal regions to fill buckets of water. But the buckets were full of holes, the water ran out as fast as it was poured in, and they are still engaged in their hopeless task. This old legend seems to us to be an emblem of the teaching of history. The buckets are the minds of the pupils. The liquid poured in is the milk-and-watery information that goes by the name of historical knowledge. And the daughters of Danaus

are the teachers of history. What crime they have committed to be condemned to such a thankless task, we know not. But there they are, incessantly pouring into the youthful minds facts and dates, and then finding, when they look into the minds, nothing but emptiness. It is difficult to detect among the mass of people any knowledge of history whatever. To most the past is utterly dark and dead; and they cannot be said, in the words of Shakespeare, to be 'endowed with large discourse of reason, looking before and after.' Now, Providence has provided a remedy for this great general shortcoming. He has supplied a short, easy, and simple method of learning history. The great men of each age have been endowed with such wide sympathy and such strong capacity that they absorb all the information of that age. There is not an important fact or sentiment which is not to be found in them. There is not an important action in which they do not play a part. They are the embodiment of all that is valuable in that age. They are history incarnate. And instead of losing ourselves in the labyrinths of small facts and names which make up ordinary chronicles, we can get, in the lives of great men, all

the main incidents of the time, strung like pearls upon the golden thread of their own personal career. For example, where can we find a better account of the old Greeks and Romans than in Plutarch's Lives; or a more vivid representation of the struggle for Scottish independence than in the lives of Wallace and Bruce; or a more interesting and complete chronicle of the great war at the beginning of this century, than in the lives of Napoleon, Nelson, and Wellington? We thus, on easy and pleasant terms, master the accumulated wisdom of the past, and become

‘The heirs of all the ages, in the foremost files of time.’

4. The study of biography, if properly prosecuted, should increase our faith in God's providence. When we see how degraded, how selfish, how sensual, nay, how devilish, many of our fellow-creatures are, our faith in God's providence is apt to be shaken. We are inclined to feel that human nature is a wretched thing, only a few degrees above the bestial; we almost despair of the progress and amelioration of the race; and we begin to think that this world may be a God-forsaken planet. Now *one* remedy

for this despair is the contemplation of the great men whose memory lives in biography. These men are likenesses of God. They are, indeed, set in frames of clay, and often blurred and even shattered by the accidents and storms of time, yet still they retain the lineaments of the Great Original — His truthfulness, sympathy, and long-suffering goodness. And hence it happens that the contemplation of such men as Socrates, St. Paul, John Howard, David Living-stone, makes us feel that this world is not God-forsaken after all. Such men as these stand in the same relation to God as the planets do to the sun. They came originally from Him; from Him they draw their lustre; and in the dark night of time, while He remains unseen, they reflect His light, and shed down comfort and guidance upon the dim and dangerous paths of groping humanity.

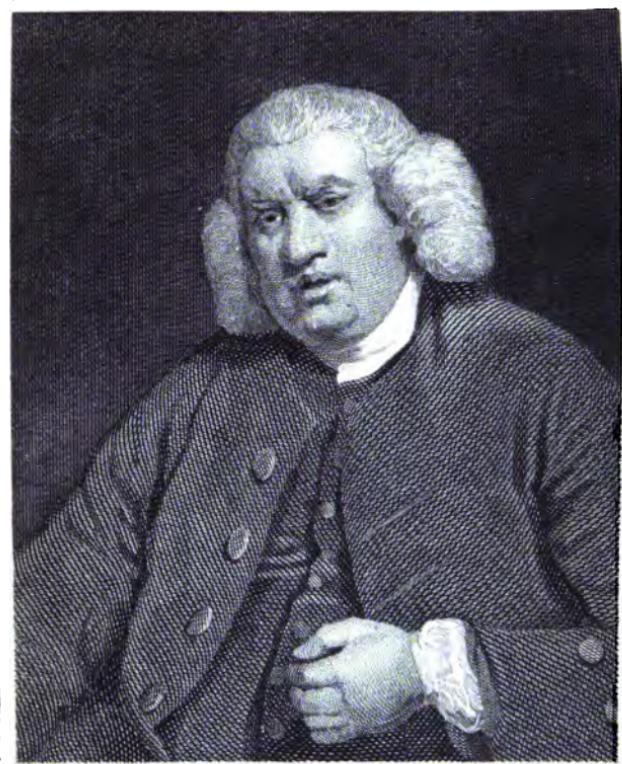




CHAPTER IV.

HISTORY.

THE study of history is founded on a great law of our nature. Man is not content with his own narrow experience. He wishes to share in the experience of others, and to add that experience to his own. Now, he has a marvellous faculty which enables his soul (as it were) to go out of his body, to travel abroad, to enter into other people's bodies, to see through their eyes, and to partake of their joys and sorrows. This power is called sympathy, and this sympathy is in proportion to the degree of humanity in the man. If he is of a low type, his sympathy does not carry him further than his parish. It makes him a village gossip, the Paul Pry of the neighbourhood, and he is found, with spectacles on nose, and umbrella under his arm, haunting the street and by-lanes of the hamlet, and taking an



Engraving by W. Edwards.

Samuel Johnson
Engraving by W. Edwards
from a Picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, late
in the possession of H. B. St. John.

The Highways of Literature p. 96.



absorbing interest in what the Joneses are to have for dinner, and in who the strangers can be that are arriving at Colonel Hardy's. But if a man is of a higher type, his sympathy is not bounded by the district in which he lives, but goes abroad over the whole earth. He becomes, in fact, the reader of the newspaper, the village politician; and without stirring from his easy-chair at the club fire, he can, by aid of the paper, sit in Parliament and hear the speeches, travel with Stanley through the thorny brakes and pestilential morasses of Africa, or look on the fierce and protracted struggle which deluged with blood the plains of Bulgaria. But if he is of the highest type of all, his sympathy is not only as broad as the world, but as long as the course of time. He becomes the large-hearted, large-minded student of history. To him no country is foreign, no custom obsolete. The men of the silent past exercise a strange fascination over him. Their very dust is dear to him. He longs to call them to life again, to see their forms, dress, habits, to watch their actions, and to understand their sentiments. He is constantly striving, (with reverence be it spoken,) towards the omniscience and omnipresence of his

Maker, with whom the past is present and the distant near.

But the next momentous question arises, What is the best method of prosecuting these studies? To study history, we need scarcely say, is not to learn it as it is generally learned at school. It is not to store away a few names and dates, and allow them to lie about in a confused group in the mind. It is not, in other words, to turn the mind into a lumber-room. It is to do something infinitely more comprehensive and more difficult than this. It is to transport ourselves out of the present into the past, to live in spirit among a people of a bygone age, to notice their appearance, houses, manners, and general condition, to look at things from their point of view, and thus to form a just estimate of their merits and their failings. It is, in fact, to realize the past.

To realize the past! To make it real! To turn that dim, mysterious region of ghosts into a palpable, sunlit land, inhabited by flesh-and-blood people in everyday dress and with everyday manners. 'A very difficult task,' you will say. Still it can be done, partially if not altogether.

Of course the chief method is to study the works of those great historians who have gathered and arranged the facts of the past into a connected narrative. That method we need not dwell upon, for it is well understood by every student. But there are certain important *auxiliary* methods which are apt to be overlooked, and to which we must call particular attention.

The past is not altogether dead. Part of it, at least, is still extant. We have battle-fields on which the men of other days struggled and bled, mouldering castles in which they lived, armour in which they encased themselves, and weapons and other relics which they handled. All these are genuine bits of the past surviving in the midst of the present. When, therefore, we are studying the history of a country, we should visit its battle-fields and castles; we should examine its armour, weapons, and other relics. If we do this, two important results will follow.

The *first* result will be that, when we form a picture in our mind of any scene in the history of that country, *all* the details will not be imaginary. Some of them will be real, and those that are real

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The *first* result will be that, when we form a picture in our mind of any scene in the history of that country, *all* the details will not be imaginary. Some of them will be real, and those that are real

will serve as a sort of a skeleton or framework round which all the others can be hung. It is with history as it is with palæontology. Give the palæontologist a few fossil bones, and he can build up the skeleton, cover it with flesh, and present you with a picture of the whole animal. In the same way, give the historian (say for instance) a battle-field, a coat of armour, and a few weapons, and with the aid of his imagination he can summon up the two armies, clothe them in their accoutrements, and make them charge, retreat, and rally, just as they did on the eventful day. For an example, take Scott's description of the battle of Flodden. How was he able to represent all the details of that disastrous fight with a vividness which has never been surpassed? For this simple reason. Not only was he familiar with the facts recorded in the books of Scottish history, but he had frequently visited the battle-field, knew, in fact, every foot of the ground, and had seen and handled armour and weapons which had been used in the fight. Accordingly, when he was writing the description, he was carried in imagination to the scene of the bloody struggle, and felt himself on enchanted ground. The two armies rose before his mind's eye and began to

go through their manœuvres: the English army crossing the bridge over the Till in the face of the Scottish army, and the Scottish army letting slip the opportunity which they had at that moment of attacking and routing them. In fact, he sees the whole movement so clearly that he forgets he is a historian. He remembers only that he is an on-looker and a patriotic Scotsman, and he cries out loudly, upbraiding his countrymen for their stupid inactivity:

'And why stands Scotland idly now,
Dark Flodden ! on thy airy brow,
Since England gains the pass the while,
And struggles through the deep defile ?
What checks the fiery soul of James ?
Why sits that champion of dames
Inactive on his steed,
And sees between him and his land,
Between him and Tweed's southern strand,
His host Lord Surrey lead ?
What vails the vain knight-errant's brand ?
O Douglas, for thy leading wand !
Fierce Randolph, for thy speed !
O for one hour of Wallace wight,
Or well-skilled Bruce, to rule the fight,
And cry—"St. Andrew and our right !"
Another sight had seen that morn,
From Fate's dark book a leaf be torn,
And Flodden had been Bannockburn !'

The *second* result will be that not only will these relics form the framework of our representations of the past, but they will stimulate the imagination and heighten its power of realizing. Truly these relics are magic spells conjuring up the shades of the departed. When we linger and ponder over a famous battle-field, we cannot help fancying that the spirits of the dead heroes are hovering round us. When we take up the weapons of an old warrior, we almost feel the touch of the dead hand upon it. And if we wish to understand thoroughly any historic event, we must not be content with mastering all that books can tell us about it ; but we must go to the actual spot where the event happened and study it there. For example, let us suppose that a man wishes to realize thoroughly the murder of Rizzio. He goes to Holyrood Palace, to Queen Mary's Rooms, alone (if possible), and at midnight, when the pale moonlight is streaming through the windows, and showing the outline, without exposing the decay, of the ancient furniture. Standing there amid these silent memorials of the past, he notes the different spots where the different incidents happened, and tries to picture accurately the different stages of the terrible tragedy.

There are the walls and the furniture which formed the background and the accessories of that bloody picture. There is the very doorway leading in from the private staircase, where the faces of the assassins appeared. There is the small supper-room where Rizzio was seated beside the Queen and her ladies, and where he rose up with terror in his looks and tried to find protection behind his royal mistress. There is the Presence Chamber through which he was dragged towards the public staircase, and there, at the top of the staircase, is the very spot where he was thrown down, bleeding from fifty-six wounds. As the spectator stands there, and considers that these are the very localities, almost unchanged, where that far-famed deed of woe was done, his imagination is so stimulated, and its power of realizing so increased, that he almost expects to see the forms of the actors appear and play their bloody tragedy over again in the dim moonlight.

There is a *special* relic which has a wonderful power in making us realize the past, and which, therefore, deserves particular mention. That is an old *newspaper*. A newspaper is different from almost every other literary production. It is not the work

of a particular author. It is really the work of the time itself. No doubt men are employed to report and insert notices; but these are only amanuenses. They merely hold the pen and write to the dictation of Time; and the public takes no cognisance of them, and their names are seldom known. It seems as if each day as it passes was obliged to record its wants, its events, and the utterances of its eminent men. Some of the descriptions may be exaggerated and even false, but the paper is, on the whole, true, and as far as it goes, a complete history of the time, written by the time's own hand. When we peruse an old newspaper, therefore, we seem to breathe the atmosphere of the age to which it refers. There are all the varied wants of the time in the advertising page, bold and urgent; there are its catastrophes and stirring incidents, with the first freshness of novelty and wonder still upon them; there are the speeches warm and living as they came from the lips of the speakers, and there is the applause that greeted them still ringing in the air. As number after number is turned over, day after day, and week after week, seem to be passing over us, and great events seem to be evolving before our very eyes.

When the old paper relates to a place with which we are familiar, the effect is intensified. It is interesting to read the account of the Edinburgh riots in the first part of the present century, but it is far more interesting when we know the streets, now so quiet, where these riots took place. It is delightful to read the speeches of Jeffrey, Cockburn, and Chalmers, but it is far more delightful when we know the halls which resounded to their eloquence.

There is still *another* relic of the past which is overlooked in the study of history, and that is the poetry, especially the ballad poetry, of a country. 'Our best history,' says Emerson, 'is still poetry.' To a great extent this is true. Poems and songs are the deepest feelings—the inmost soul of the times—embalmed in music and made immortal; for verse, after all, is the true *elixir vitae*. They have preserved the strifes, the hates, the loves, the sorrows, the joys, the humours, and the domestic manners of bygone days. When we read them, entering into the very spirit of them, we feel ourselves breathing the very atmosphere of the past. As a striking example, let us refer to the Scottish national poet Burns. He is really a historian. He gives us what historians proper, in

their predilection for kings, wars, and politics, are so apt to overlook, namely, an account of the condition of the mass of the people. Not only have we in his confessions regarding his own failings, passions, sentiments, aspirations and imaginings, a portrait of what a labouring man in spite of adverse circumstances might become, but in his poetry generally we have the lives of Scottish peasants of the 18th century represented in a series of pictures unrivalled for their distinctness. They are represented under all circumstances and at all places, at kirk and at market, at home and a-field.

In this way, by studying historic scenes and relics we shall realize the past, and realizing the past, we shall be better able to turn history to a practical account. We shall be better able to distinguish the facts which are true from the facts which are false, and the actions which ought to be imitated from those which ought to be avoided.

But some will say, 'This is very likely a very good theoretical plan of studying history, but is it practicable? We can understand how old newspapers and poetry are to be studied, but to visit all the historic scenes and study all the historic relics!

How is it possible? Few could afford the time or the money to enable them to be running, like the wandering Jew, all over the world, and exploring all the notable places and remains of antiquity.' To this we reply: 'Although we cannot carry out the whole of the plan, we can carry out a part of it. Although we cannot master in this way the history of the world, we can master what after all is the most interesting and the most useful—namely, the history of our own country and city.'

And if we live in some great historic town, we may have many facilities for following out this method of study. Take Edinburgh, for example. The students of history there have easy access to those relics by which alone they can realize the past. In the *first* place, they have in the Antiquarian Museum a vast collection of historic implements and remains. They there see many of the weapons by which the notable deeds of history have been wrought. They see, among many others, those stone hammers and clubs with which our early ancestors brained the wolf, the bear, and the wild ox—a battle-axe which clashed amid that terrible play of swords and spears on the plain of Bannockburn—the pulpit which (as an old

historian says) Knox was 'like to drive into blads'—the maiden which shore off many of the most aristocratic heads—and the stool which Jenny Geddes made to whistle near the ear of the service-saying dean. In the *second* place, students have in Edinburgh itself another museum, where almost every age as it has passed has left some memorial of its presence. They have a memento of the Romans in what is called the Fishwives' Causeway, near Portobello—of the Celtic King Arthur, in the picturesque hill called after him, and where he was wont to sit to view the wide and varied landscape—of the early Scottish kings, in Queen Margaret's Chapel, which, standing on the summit of the Castle-rock, has braved the battle and the breeze for so many centuries—of the Stuarts, in that part of Holyrood which they built, and where they so often held high revel—of the reign of terror that prevailed after the battle of Flodden, in the fragments of the old city wall, and in the old houses huddled together and toppling one on the top of the other—of the Reformation, in the ancient house where Knox lived, in the ancient church where he preached, and in the grave where he was laid with the funeral oration, concise but most

graphic, 'There lies one who never feared the face of man'—of Covenanting times, in the churchyard where the Covenant was signed with blood drawn from human veins, and in the Grassmarket where the Covenanters joyfully laid down their lives for their opinions—and of the great men generally, in the houses where they lived, and where, if imagination were strong enough, you might almost see their ghosts.

But after a knowledge of history has been acquired by these various methods, it must, like every other kind of knowledge, be applied to real life. It must be used to enable us to understand the real living history around us. 'The student's own life,' says Emerson, 'is the text, and books are the comment.' We might amplify the idea and say, '*The whole visible creation*, including the student himself, is the text.' It is one mighty historical work by no means finished, but always in the condition of being written. The page is the face of this wide earth; the writers are the agencies of nature, including man; the characters which they inscribe are the various physical and social phenomena; and the commentators are the ordinary historians. It is therefore necessary

to employ the knowledge which we have got from these commentators to understand the great palpable history around us. We can use this knowledge in various ways.

We can use it, *in the first place*, to appreciate our own privileges. Let us suppose that the reader is a Scotsman. By reading the history of his country, he comes to appreciate the value of his present position. He sees that long ago this country of Scotland was little else than a wilderness of mountain, moor, and thicket; how the inhabitants, especially in the southern counties, were sorely harried and oppressed by overwhelming hordes of English invaders; how, after fighting and being beaten, and fighting again and never yielding, they at last fell upon a plan of securing their freedom; how, as soon as the bale-fires on the mountains spread the alarm of an invasion, they burnt their wretched huts, drove their flocks and herds to the fastnesses among the hills, and left grim famine to meet the enemy face to face; and how, when that enemy had retreated starved out, they came back to their places of abode, re-thatched their smoked-stained hovels, and began laboriously to raise crops which they might never be

able to reap. And after reading all this, and realizing the scene in his imagination, he lifts his eyes, and lo ! he finds himself in his easy-chair by the snug fireside in perfect security, with the terrors of war no nearer than Asia or Africa. How can he fail to be struck by the contrast ? How can he fail to appreciate his material comforts far more than ever he did before ?

In the second place, the student of history can use the past to interpret the present. We cannot understand the present unless we understand the past. The present is the effect of which the past is the cause ; and we cannot appreciate the effect without knowing something of the cause. In other words, we cannot adequately understand the events of our own day unless we know history. A man who is ignorant of history knows little about the present beyond the fact that it supplies him with food, clothing, and amusement. But the historical student interprets the signs of the times, and reads a meaning in the objects around him, of which the other is altogether unconscious. Let us illustrate this by a familiar example. Let us suppose two men walking down the grand old street, the High Street of Edin-

burgh. The one is ignorant of Scottish history, the other knows it thoroughly. The former, as he stumbles along with vacant stare, sees on each side a high pile of houses built of stone and mostly ancient—and that is all.

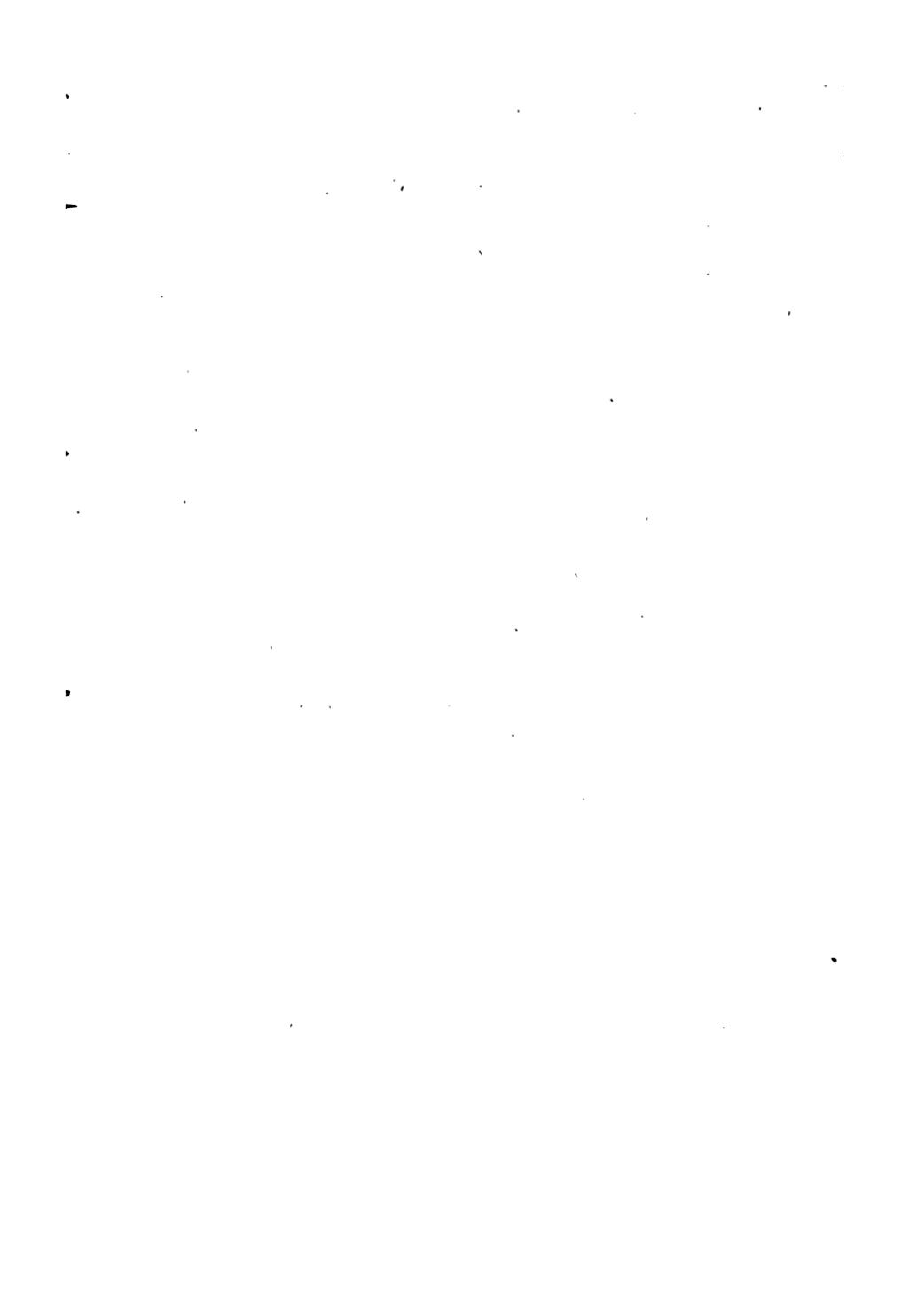
‘A tall old house with windows dim,
A tall old house is still to him,
And it is nothing more.’

But the other looks with different eyes, and sees a deep meaning in the peculiarities of the architecture. Every feature is to him an antique character—an old-fashioned scrawl which he can interpret, and which reveals to him the condition of society in by-gone days. ‘These toppling piles of masonry,’ he says, ‘bear the impress of fear upon them. They tell unmistakeably of a time when society was in an unsettled state, infested with idlers, vagabonds, thieves, cut-throats; when rascaldom was rampant everywhere, and when men were afraid to live beyond the city wall, but huddled their houses together, and piled them up, the one on the top of the other. And then these dingy and sickening closes are to me redolent of our ancestors’ ignorance. They did not

appreciate the great health-giving powers of nature, light, and fresh air. They suffered also from chronic hydrophobia or aversion to water; and so they burrowed like rabbits away from the sun and the free breezes, exclaiming, "The closer, the warmer; the clartier, the cosier." Look, too, at the crosses and texts above some of the doors. These are graphic reminders of the dark days of superstition, when the dread of evil spirits was instilled in childhood, fostered by weird stories round the winter fire, and confirmed by the teachers of religion; when the people felt that Satan's invisible world was around them, and strove to protect themselves by inscribing holy spells above the entrance of their dwellings.' Now let me ask which of these two men understands the present—the one who gazes in listless ignorance on the memorials of bygone ages, or the one to whom every relic is full of meaning ?

In the third place, we say that this study of history will aid a man in doing his everyday work. Man is what we would call an imitating animal. If you will consider the matter for a little, you will see that all his faculties have been developed by the imitation of his parents and friends. If he had not had the

opportunity of imitating them, his actions, his manners, his virtues, nay, his very speech, would have been something very different. As a general rule, a person who herds with boors becomes a boor; as a general rule, a person who associates with demigods becomes a demigod. It is companionship that makes the man. Now, the student of history moves among the very best society that ever existed. He contemplates the greatest heroes and patriots. He sympathizes with their fervent aspirations, and watches with eager interest their noble deeds. He admires them, in fact, with his whole heart; and admiration is the first step towards imitation. Insensibly he becomes infected with the nature of those he admires. His views become larger, his sympathies warmer, and his aims nobler. This must in the nature of things be the result; and this is the result which history was intended by God to produce. Now, let us ask, will large views, warm sympathies, and noble aims aid a man in his everyday work? We answer, if they do not, we know not what will.





Drawn by Jackson R.A.

Engraved by W. Reddick

WILLIAM COWPER.

*From a Picture by Jackson R.A. in the Collection
of the Right Honorable the Earl Cowper.*

The Highways of Literature p 115.



CHAPTER V.

POETRY.

WHAT is the essence of poetry? This is a very knotty question, which the greatest critics, from Plato downwards, have tried to solve. They all agree in thinking that it is found in the ideas, and not in the words; that it is not necessarily expressed in verse, but may often be seen in prose. But not one of them has devised an answer sufficiently comprehensive and explicit to gain universal assent; and in this wonderful age, which has solved so many mysteries, this simple question, 'What is poetry?' is still unsolved.

Although it would be presumptuous in us to attempt what so many have failed to accomplish, we will try to illustrate the nature of poetry by an example taken from everyday life. When a man is talking about an ordinary subject the words drop carelessly

from his mouth, and are thoroughly commonplace and monotonous. But let him see some beautiful scene, or hear of some generous deed, or address one very dear to him, and what a change comes over his language ! He has now feelings which the mere words can never express, and he, therefore, expresses them by a more elevated tone. He speaks from the inner depths of his being, and his words become flowing and musical. Now, what he utters is essentially poetry. Poetry is nothing else than the inmost expression of the soul, which naturally takes a musical or rhythmical form. The poet sings 'at heaven's gate,' and it is because he *is* at heaven's gate that he sings.

Poetry is the inmost expression of the soul—the very life of the soul. Therefore it is the very life of society—the very spirit of the age. Whatever inspires and dilates the soul—whatever takes the form of an aspiration—is poetry. Take away poetry, and you take away the fervour of the orator, the heroism of the warrior, the ardour of the philosopher, the enthusiasm of the artist, and the burning zeal of the philanthropist. Take away poetry, and you take away whatever is great and ennobling in human

nature. You draw the very wine of life, 'and nought is left but the mere lees to brag of.' Art and industry may supply and set up all the vast and complicated machinery of society ; but poetry is the steam which puts all its resistless power into motion.

Since poetry plays such an important part in the business of life, we should all strive to be poetical—we should all study poetry. But some one says, 'I have no taste for it ; the gods have not made me poetical.' To him we say, 'You were never more mistaken. God has given a soul to you as well as to other people. The fact that you stand upright with your face to the universe, and do not grovel on all fours, is a proof of this. And if you have a soul, you must have some poetical capacity within it. It is true that you may have been cursed all your life with prosaic surroundings. You may have been tossed in early infancy neck-and-crop into the world, to fight your own way. Your head and hands may have been completely taken up in supplying the bare wants of existence. The bustle, the jostling, and the murky atmosphere of a large town may have hardened you and smoke-dried you, and turned you into a walking embodiment of prose ; but still, in the

nature of things, there must be some spark of poetry within you, which by judicious treatment could be fanned into a flame.'

But the next and the great question is, What is this treatment—how is poetry to be best studied? The ordinary answer is, By reading the best poets. This, of course, is essential. We learn almost everything by imitation. But this method is so well recognised, and has been so often explained, that we need not dwell particularly upon it. We prefer to explain *another* method, which ought always to be the concomitant of this method, but which has, in a most unaccountable way, been almost universally ignored.

In this present age of cheap literature, we believe too much in books. We believe in the letter more than in the spirit. We seem to think that when we have mastered the whole subject of which the book treats, there is nothing more to be done. We do not take into account that a book is only a catalogue, and at the very best a descriptive catalogue of the great facts of nature. We must look for the facts themselves, and by the aid of the book try to see them and understand them. The old woman's argument,

‘It is in print, therefore it must be true,’¹ will not suffice. We must, if possible, verify everything, realize it, and make it thoroughly our own.

We would advise you, therefore, if you wish to develop your poetical faculty, to study the beauties of nature along with the beauties of the poets. Nay, if you take things in their natural order, you should study the beauties of nature first. Otherwise, you will not appreciate the beauties of the poets. For by what means do the poets expect to produce an effect upon your minds? Simply by images and associations of things. And how can we appreciate the images and associations of things, if we do not know the things themselves! Take, for example, that line in Tennyson’s description of a May morning:

‘To left and right
The cuckoo told his name to all the hills.’

Now, to a town-bred youth, who had never been beyond the beat of the lamplighter, and who only knew the word cuckoo as the name of a bird, this passage would convey no distinct image. If he thought of it at all, he would regard it as an elaborate

¹ Mopsa, in *The Winter’s Tale*, says, ‘I love a ballad in print, a’ faith; for then we are sure they are true.’

bit of nonsense. The idea of a bird lighting upon a hill, and formally announcing its name! The only bird he could think of as capable of doing that would be a parrot. But to us who have drunk in all the sights and sounds of the country, what a charming scene these few words call up! We forthwith feel ourselves far away from the turmoil of the city in a well-known valley. It is the merry month of May, when the landscape is clothed in fresh and delicate green. Amid the peaceful sounds of the country, ever and anon there comes from the distant heights the faint, musical cry of the cuckoo; and it seems to us as if that sweet guest of summer, that bird which never knows winter, that bird whose bower is ever green, and whose sky is ever clear, were flitting about, and in his innocent joy 'telling his name to all the hills.'

But to find out the beauties of nature is not altogether an easy task. That this country of Scotland is beautiful, is a fact universally acknowledged—a fact that is proved by the crowds of visitors that every year overrun it, with opera-glasses at their eyes, and exclamations of wonder and delight in their mouths. But for many years this fact was unknown.

The lakes and the mountains were the same as they are now; generation after generation both of natives and strangers stared at them and saw nothing remarkable, until seventy years ago there appeared upon the scene a young Edinburgh lawyer named Walter Scott. He discovered the beauty and divulged it to the world, and so closely has his name been associated with his own romantic country, that we have heard of unsophisticated foreigners who fancied that it was called Scotland after him. It is perfectly necessary, therefore, that people should be taught to see what is beautiful in natural objects. And we now go on to lay down certain rules which you must observe in studying nature; and by nature we mean, not only the material universe, but mankind also. These rules may seem commonplace; but they are based upon the very constitution of the mind, and are followed either consciously or unconsciously by all true poets and philosophers. We divide them into two great classes.

- I. Those relating to the material universe, and
- II. Those relating to mankind.

- I. Those relating to the material universe.

1. My first advice is, *When you go into the country, abandon yourselves to the genial influences of nature.* How very few do this! To most people the pleasures of the country are insipid, and they dilute them, nay, adulterate them, with their town pleasures. They dare not venture into the woods and fields unprotected; and various are the devices they use to defend themselves against the horrors of nature. One man goes provided with a fishing-rod, and keeps his attention fixed all day upon an artificial fly, which he flicks about on the surface of a stream. Another arms himself with a gun to break the oppressive silence of the hills. A third takes care to protect himself with a jolly picnic party, and a strong reinforcement of bottles of champagne. A fourth carries with him into the country the smoke and worry of the town in the shape of a tobacco-pipe, which he puffs incessantly, and a companion who can talk of nothing but business. All these, in fact, are thoroughbred town-birds, and are out of their element when they are out of sight of the tiles and chimney-pots. Now, if you wish to get any good from nature, you must treat her very differently. You must love her with your whole heart:

'You must love her ere to you
She will seem worthy of your love.'

Set apart some balmy, sunshiny day. Cast aside all your town cares and pleasures. Get out of the dust and smoke as quickly as you may. By the aid of a cab, or omnibus, or tramway car, pass as quickly as possible through the narrow suburbs where hucksters squall and dirty children scream, over the Macadamized highways where high walls on each side intercept the view, and the wheels of heavily-laden carts, grind down the stones into dust, and out at last into the pure country atmosphere where nature is living and breathing all around. There seek out some grassy valley or some wooded field, and sitting down, open your senses, as it were, one after the other, and one at a time, to the genial influences of Summer. First, let your eye wander over the varied forms of flower and tree and rock. Then let your ear delight in the sighing of the breeze, the tinkle of the brook, the hum of the bee, and the trill of the bird. Next, let your sense of smell inhale the delicate odours that perfume the air. In fact, let your whole being absorb the many charms with which the world is filled.

This is the way in which poetry can be naturally imbibed. 'It is,' says Emerson, 'a secret which every intellectual man quickly learns, that beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect, he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect doubled on itself) by abandonment to the nature of things; that beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power, on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him.' Under the spacious dome of the sky there is found the best school for such poetical lessons. Poets in all ages have caught their inspiration in rural or desert solitudes. Burns declares :

'The Muse nae poet ever fand her,
Till by himself' he learned to wander
Adoon some trottin' burn's meander.'

Wordsworth, too, speaking of the poet, says :

'The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed,
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.'

Yes ! Moses in the wilderness of Midian, David among the mountains of Judæa, Homer on the shores

of the Archipelago, Virgil amid the pastures of Mantua, Shakespeare by the banks of the Avon, (Milton among the fields of Horton, Wordsworth beside the placid English lakes, Tennyson on the breezy downs of the Isle of Wight, all opened their souls to the influences of earth and sky. The spirit of Nature in all her radiant charms entered through their senses, permeated every nook of their being, and took possession of their heart and imagination. They became her willing instruments, and uttered thoughts brilliant with her own light and glowing with her own warmth.

Poets, in fact, are the favourite children of Mother Nature ; and when they want comfort, encouragement, and new ideas, they return to her. They do not find her always smiling, for she has often very rough and serious work to do ; but to them who love her with their whole heart, she is always beautiful, her breath is always sweet, and even in her gravest tones there is always exquisite music. And when, like children, they throw themselves on her lap, she soothes them, stimulates them, tells them the most wonderful tales, and calls up before them the pleasantest associations.

2. Our second advice is, *Bring out more vividly by contrast any special beauty of nature.* If one colour had always been before our eyes, we would not have the slightest idea of colour. If one sound had always been ringing in our ears, we would not have the slightest idea of sound. It is only when the mind passes from one sensation to another that it can form an idea. An act of contrast, therefore, is necessary to every act of perception. Nay, the keener the act of perception is, the keener is the act of contrast. The very words which we use when we imply a keen perception, namely, the words *discernment* and *discrimination*, literally mean *seeing a difference or contrast*. We cannot make the simplest statement without instinctively performing this act. When we say, 'This table is long,' we contrast it with some short table, the image of which we have in our memory. The possession, too, of this faculty of contrast is one of the distinctions between a fool and a wise man. In the eyes of a fool almost everything is the same. 'John,' said the minister to the village natural, 'why do you not work? You can at least herd.' 'Me herd!' said the fool, 'I dinna ken corn frae gress.' A wise man,

on the other hand, is always setting things side by side, and discerning their differences and fixing their proper value.

Now, if you wish to enjoy the beauties of nature fully, you must be constantly using this faculty of contrast. It will be a mental magnifying-glass, bringing out distinctly every quality upon which it may be turned. Contrast the graceful form of a tree with the shapeless rock, the delicate green of the grass with the dingy soil, the deep blue of the sea with the yellow sand along its margin, and you will have a far keener sense of these beautiful objects than ever you had before. And if you desire to appreciate intensely the charms which God has lavished upon the earth, compare what is with what might have been. He might have made the earth perfectly level, vegetation colourless, and the sky a canopy of murky vapours; but instead of that He has diversified the landscape with sheltered valley and gently-swelling hill, He has made every plant to glow with living colours, and by the agency of the sun, He has turned the vapoury masses of the air into draperies of silver and gold.

All the great poets practise this art of contrasting.

They do it instinctively. It is one of the gifts which genius bestows upon them. They heighten every beauty of nature by setting it in fancy, if not in reality, beside its opposite. They place the rose beside the thorn, the sunshine beside the shadow, the freshening airs of the country beside the pestilent fogs of the town. Shakespeare especially is a master of this art, as he is of all other great arts. Witness the speech of the banished Duke in the forest of Arden. He is surrounded by his courtiers who have followed him into exile; and desirous that they should enjoy the delights of the country, he heightens those delights by contrasting them with the frivolities and follies of the court:

'Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference,—as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say,
This is no flattery—these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.
Sweet are the uses of adversity;
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.'

3. Our third advice is, *Try to see a likeness of the present object to some former object of your experience.* In studying nature we may often find it advantageous to liken an object to some other thing, in other words, to use a simile. The facts of the world are so multitudinous and so varied, that the mind is apt to become bewildered among them. Before it can apprehend them in any way, it must arrange them into classes according to their likeness. The acquisition of knowledge, therefore, is just *assimilation*, that is, adding a fact newly perceived to a class of like facts in the memory. The ordinary spectator sees a tree distinctly, only when he has recognised its likeness to other trees he has previously seen. The scientific man pursues his investigations, only by detecting the likeness of the object under examination to objects which are already classified in his mind. And so, in the same way, the poetic student should use the faculty of drawing likenesses. In other words, he should employ the simile or (what is just a short simile) the metaphor. It would be of

invaluable service to him. In the *first* place, it would often enable him to give a definite description of objects which would otherwise be almost indescribable. For example: 'On a clear frosty November afternoon,' says an anonymous author, 'I saw the Pentland Hills delicately covered with snow, and their western slopes glowing in the setting sun. I was puzzled how to describe the phenomenon so as to give it pointed expression. Then it occurred to me that I might represent the sky as commiserating the ravages which winter has made upon the countenance of the earth, and as sprinkling her features with pearl-powder, and brightening the effect by a slight tinge of rose-colour.' In the *second* place, the use of the simile would give importance to objects otherwise insignificant. A humorous instance of this appears in the following anecdote:—A gentleman, accompanied by his son, a mischievous boy, had been visiting at a country mansion. When they were coming away through the grounds, a tame jackdaw, making short flights, attended them to the gate. The boy was amused and astonished at this. But the father said, 'Ah! this is the policeman of the establishment, and from information he has received

he suspects you, and is determined to see you off the premises.'

The power of using similitudes is one of the great prerogatives of a poet. His ideas are too imposing and too vivid to be expressed by ordinary language. They must speak to the imagination. Therefore, instead of words, he uses figures; instead of giving a mere statement, he presents a picture. He employs the phenomena of nature that are well known and striking to stand for those that are obscure and insignificant. He lays creation under contribution. He is like the angels of Milton, wielding as weapons the rocks and the mountains. He is like Orpheus, causing the stocks and stones to live and move to the sound of his music.

4. Our fourth advice is, *Learn, if possible, to look upon every scene as a whole.* A prosaic man cannot do this. Andrew Fairservice, when he looked at a waterfall, saw none of its imposing surroundings. He saw not the lichens and wildflowers and hardy bushes which grew on the perilous edges of the rock, and decked its dull face with living colours. He saw not that pervading atmosphere of spray, which,

twinkling with the colours of the rainbow, enveloped the whole scene. He saw only 'a burn jawin' ower a craig.' Bailie Nicol Jarvie was another of the same kind. When sailing down Loch Lomond, he gazed not upon those wooded islands that seem to float upon the pellucid waters. He beheld not those unrivalled banks built up of sloping lawns, and hanging woods, and mountain-tops touching the clouds. He saw merely the water before him, and thought that the loch ought to be drained, leaving only a small strip in the middle for coal-barges to sail up and down.

Of this same class of prosaic creatures, an ass is a lower specimen, but still a specimen. He stands upon the heath, encircled with the glorious universe of bright green earth and bright blue sky, but he sees none of its myriad beauties. He sees nothing but the thistle wagging before his nose. The thistle is all the world to him.

Now, Nature, when her work is not interrupted by meddlesome man, never lets a beautiful object stand by itself. Gradually but surely she surrounds it with a worthy setting. She makes all the neighbouring objects in keeping with it, so that

all the objects collectively heighten its individual beauty :

‘The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren.
How many things by season, seasoned are
To their right praise and true perfection !’

Accordingly, if you wish to enjoy the charms of nature fully, you must look upon each scene as a whole. It is, indeed, very advisable to concentrate your attention at first upon any striking object. You will in this way see much to wonder at and admire. But after you have done that, let your mind pass on and take in the kindred objects around. Look upon the whole scene as one picture, the different parts of which are all intended to contribute to the general effect. You will be surprised at the result. The first beautiful object upon which your eye lights, will waken an emotion of pleasure ; but each of the other objects, as your gaze moves along, will increase that emotion until your whole soul is pervaded by a glow of delight. The delight will be great for a very obvious reason. Each object, in turn, of the harmonious group will aid in intensifying it. Take a familiar example : A man who is fond of the lower

animals sees a little lamb on the dusty highway. He admires it, and derives pleasure from the sight. But how much will his pleasure be increased when he sees it afterwards in a green meadow ! All the pleasant objects round it—the sunny hillocks on which it gambols, the daisies which dapple the grass, and the budding hedges which enclose the field—intensify the feeling of beauty and gratification.

This power of regarding a scene as a whole, is one of the gifts of the poets. It is one of the strongest proofs that their inspiration is genuine. It shows that they are (with reverence be it spoken) in sympathy with the Creator; that they look for a method under every collection of phenomena; that they regard no object merely by itself, but as part of a whole. And this is seen in their language. Where other writers would use a simple word or expression, they present a picture. Where other writers speak merely to the understanding, they address the imagination. They are not content with placing an object simply before their readers, but they set off that object with all these circumstances with which it is usually associated. This is especially the case with Milton. When in his many similes he intro-

duces an object for the purpose of illustration, he not only mentions those qualities of the object which illustrate the matter in question, but he represents the whole object with all its attributes. For example, in comparing the rebel angels crowding into Pandemonium to a swarm of bees, he not only refers to the multitude of bees, but he presents a complete picture of a beehive amid the dews and fresh flowers of a sunny garden :

‘As bees

In springtime when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters ; they among fresh dews and flowers
Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubbed with balm, expatiate and confer
Their state-affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarmed and were straitened.’

5. My fifth advice is, *Dwell as much as possible upon the associations you have formed regarding the beautiful objects in nature.* We cannot agree with Alison, Jeffrey, and others, that our notions of the beautiful depend altogether upon association. But there is no doubt that these notions are greatly heightened by association. Association is one of the magical powers bestowed upon man. By means of

it we can often change what is unpleasant into something which is very agreeable.

The object which awakens the association may be the taste of an article of food, the scent of a flower, or the sound of a tune. In all these cases the effect is the same. It is like a raising of the dead. By means of it, forms long since gone reappear, and voices long since silent are heard again. By means of it, a pleasant epoch of our life, with its thoughts, emotions, and sensations, and even with its very atmosphere, is suddenly let in upon us. It is the golden key that unlocks the jewel-case of memory. It is the true elixir of life, keeping us in perpetual youth. The most insignificant cause often suffices to awaken this magical world. 'I was,' says an anonymous author, 'visiting the scenes of my boyhood, and was walking along a well-known rustic road by the side of a wood. I felt depressed at the change I saw everywhere; and the whole landscape seemed empty of delight. But suddenly from a neighbouring tree was heard the small monotone of a bird, which changed the whole aspect of the scene. It was the song of the chaffinch. It was the same note which I had heard thirty years before. It was

a veritable bit of the past, and it brought the joys of the past along with it. I was a boy again, full of youthful feelings and hopes, with the faces of my youthful companions around me, and with the sunshine of former and more delightful summer days resting upon those woods and braes, which a few moments before had appeared so melancholy. And it occurred to me, that here was another instance of the beneficent tendency that pervades all the workings of nature. These meagre monotones of birds, just from their very sameness, serve a most important end in our education. They are little threads connecting the present and the past, and conducting, from our youthful days, a current of feeling which keeps our hearts ever fresh and young. May I not go farther, and say that by linking our present and our bygone joys together, they enable us to realize the never-failing goodness of God ?'

Now, when you are walking in the country, use this potent faculty of association. Some of the pleasant objects—the white cottages, the stately mansions, the green meadows, the murmuring woods—will call up before you, perhaps, the bright hours of some happy holiday, or the enchanted scenes of

childhood. Let your mind linger and dwell on these cherished associations, and you will deem these objects all the more beautiful which summoned them up before you.

That the poets intensify their conceptions by the influence of association there cannot be a doubt. How they delight to call up the pleasant ideas which their observation and their reading have connected with special objects ! We may refer generally to Milton, under the touch of whose vivifying genius even barbaric and obscure geographical names become full of music and beauty :

‘Him the Ammonite
Worshipped in Rabba and her watery plain,
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream
Of utmost Arnon. . . .
Next Chemos, the obscene dread of Moab’s sons
From Aroar to Nebo, and the wild
Of southmost Abarim ; in Hesebon
And Horonaim, Seon’s realm, beyond
The flowery dale of Sibma clad with vines,
And Eleale to the Asphaltic pool. . . .
Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharpar, lucid streams.’

But we may also refer to a particular instance in which the power of association over a poet is well

illustrated. When Burns was in Edinburgh, he walked one morning with Professor Dugald Stewart to the top of Blackford Hill. As they stood there looking southward, and marked the farm-houses and cottages which studded the quiet landscape, the tears came into the poet's eyes, and he confessed that the great charm of such a view arose from the associations which he had with these humble dwellings whose smoke was now rising in the calm air. When he thought of the lowly worth, the fortitude, the piety, which were often to be witnessed in these poor habitations, his heart swelled with feelings which his tongue could scarcely express :

'From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad ;
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
An honest man's the noblest work of God.'

6. Our sixth and last advice is, *Bear in mind, in all your studies of nature, that God is moving and working in all you see.* The beauties of nature, when regarded by themselves, are apt to be tame. They were never intended to be contemplated in this way. A finished picture by some unknown artist has not the same interest as a picture by an artist

who is known to us, and who is still engaged in finishing it. In the same way, a world which is supposed to have come into being by chance, cannot influence us so much as a world which we feel has been made by a Supreme Intelligence, and on which we see the Supreme Intelligence still working. We, indeed, refer the ceaseless changes in inorganic bodies to the 'laws of nature,' and in organic bodies to 'life and instinct.' But 'laws of nature,' 'life and instinct,' if they mean anything at all, mean simply the power of God. It is God that is moving and changing everything. Nothing is yet perfect. The world is not yet made. The work of creation is still going on. 'My Father,' says Christ, 'worketh hitherto, and I work.' Such a consideration as this will give you a heightened interest in all the objects of nature. You will feel that you are standing by and witnessing the workings of an omnipotent and beneficent Agency. You will see its movement in every phenomenon—in the cloud that floats through the air, in the brook that gravitates towards the ocean, in the tree that springs upwards and spreads out all the different parts of its being to catch the air and light, in the living creatures that swarm everywhere and find food

convenient for them. Nothing will appear insignificant, for the minutest objects will be regarded as instruments in that same Almighty hand which moulded and poised the countless suns and systems that people immensity.

It is this sense of the omnipresence of God in all the phenomena of nature that gives to our great descriptive poets—to Milton, to Wordsworth, to Cowper—their highest inspiration :

‘There lives and works
A soul in all things, and that soul is God.
The beauties of the wilderness are His
That make so gay the solitary place
Where no eye sees them. And the fairer forms
That cultivation glories in, are His.
He sets the bright procession on its way,
And marshals all the order of the year :
He marks the bound which winter may not pass
And blunts his pointed fury ; in its case
Russet and rude folds up the tender germ,
Uninjured, with inimitable art ;
And ere one flowery season fades and dies,
Designs the blooming wonders of the next.’

Such, then, are the directions for the study of the poetry that is to be found in the material universe.

If you are dull-headed, prosaic, and spiritless, you will not detect their utility, and will neglect them. But if you are intelligent, and high-souled, and

eager to appreciate this beautiful world in which you have been placed, you will remember them, and strive to reduce them to practice.

II. We come now to consider the rules for discovering the beauties in the character of man.

There are some writers who assert that there is no beauty in humanity, that humanity is utterly selfish and corrupt. If these writers are describing humanity as represented in their own persons, they are probably right. They ought to know best. But if they are describing it as it is represented in the highest of the species, they are wrong. Man in his best estate is the noblest work of God that has ever been seen on this earth. He has come, he knows not whence. He is going, he knows not whither. He finds himself on this globe, which is but an atom among countless atoms drifting through the boundless realms of space. He walks on the dust of his forefathers, and amid the crumbling ruins of their most boasted works. Around, above, and below him, working silently but resistlessly, is that great organization of forces called the powers of nature—a mighty and remorseless machine which may crush

him at a moment's warning. Yet he bates not one jot of heart and hope. Spurning the pleasures of the body, he delights himself in the works of God, discovers the laws by which they operate, and compels the great natural agencies—water, air, vapour, fire, lightning—to be his servants. Rising above selfish wants, he enlarges his heart and devises beneficent plans for his fellow-mortals in all ages to come. He irradiates his character with the Christian virtues, which shed a new light upon earth ; and when death summons him away, he lays down with resignation all his hard-won knowledge and accomplishments, and goes into the unknown future trusting all his happiness and spiritual existence into the hands of a merciful but unseen Father.

How to discover the beauties of man's character is a most comprehensive question, and might occupy a whole volume. The same rules should be followed in studying human nature which we recommended in the study of physical nature. We would therefore say in this case too : Open your minds to the influence of what is good in a human being, bring it out by contrast, heighten it by simile, study it in connection with its surroundings, and always bear in mind

that it is the evidence of God working in the soul. But in addition to these, three simple practical rules may also be given.

1. Our first advice is, *Clear your mind of all class prejudices.* You are apt (such is human nature) to dislike certain people at first sight. You do not approve of their appearance, their dress, their habits, their opinions. They are, in fact, 'not your style,' and you cannot bear them. Well, let us suppose that your style is the best style. Even in that case, would it be an improvement to have everybody exactly like you? What a monotonous, wearisome, perplexing, maddening world it would be! Our opinion is, that there would be a general rush to suicide. You may take it for granted that these people, whom you dislike so much, are useful, and in some way ornamental. Were that not the case, they would not be here. Depend upon it, there is much truth in the good old Scottish saying, 'It takts a great mony folk to mak' a warl.' The world could not do without the most insignificant man in it.

2. Our second advice is, *Be prepared to find*

some good in every one. God made men in His own image. He not only gives them day by day their bodily food, but also their spiritual food. In every one, therefore, however bad he may be, there must be some virtue—some feeling of propriety, or shame, or remorse, or desire for improvement. It may not always appear in the conventional form, but still it is there. Accordingly, it is our duty to refrain from condemning any one at first sight as totally and irretrievably bad. One of the great charms of the popular American writer, Bret Harte, arises from the fact, that he often takes as his subject the very dregs and offscourings of all nations, who have crowded to the diggings of Western America, and shows that even in them strange and fitful gleams of genuine virtue and heroism occasionally burst forth.

3. Our last and most important advice is, *Sympathize with all your fellow-creatures.* Put yourselves in their position, and invest yourselves with their circumstances. Look at things from their point of view; and whenever you feel inclined to slight any person, try to fancy what you would have been if

you had been born and brought up amid the same surroundings. You will come to the conclusion that you would have been very much the same as he is, and you will now be inclined to make less of his faults and more of his virtues than you would otherwise have done. Sympathy is the best of all the poetical graces. The poet *has* fancy, *has* imagination, *has* the gift of language, but he *is* sympathy, sympathy personified, a living embodiment of sympathy. Why is Shakespeare the greatest of poets? Because he has given the fullest and most faithful representation of all classes of mankind. How was he able to do this? Because his sympathy was boundless. His soul was not confined to his own narrow body. It roamed at large, and inhabited the whole of humanity. It entered the hearts of all men, from the king to the clown, felt and understood all their virtues and all their frailties, and represented them impartially and yet lovingly.

This is the way in which poetry ought to be studied. It ought to be read by the light of nature. The student of poetry, like the student of the other fine arts, must be constantly falling back upon nature. He must be ever appealing from his books

to her. For everything in *them*, he must find, *at least*, a germ or hint in *her*. It is true that in poetry there are ideal scenes and characters which have no exact counterpart in nature; but the individual components of these are to be found in the real world. The *wholes* are ideal, but the parts are *real*, and can easily be verified in nature. By this method alone, then, can poetry be studied properly. The student who is content to read books without looking at nature, may understand the letter, but can never thoroughly realize the spirit of poetry.





CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAMA.

THERE are two methods of narrating an action in which several persons have been engaged. One narrator is dispassionate and, to a certain extent, unsympathetic. In recalling and describing the event, he looks, as it were, from a distance, and is content to tell in everyday language and in everyday style what the people did and said. But another narrator has the mimetic power, and by his very nature, instead of merely describing the event, is forced to realize it. Divesting himself of his own circumstances and of his own character, he throws himself into the circumstances and characters of the persons he is describing. Imitating in turn the expression, voice, and ideas of each of them, he does the deeds and speaks the words of them all in rapid succession, and actually makes the whole scene real



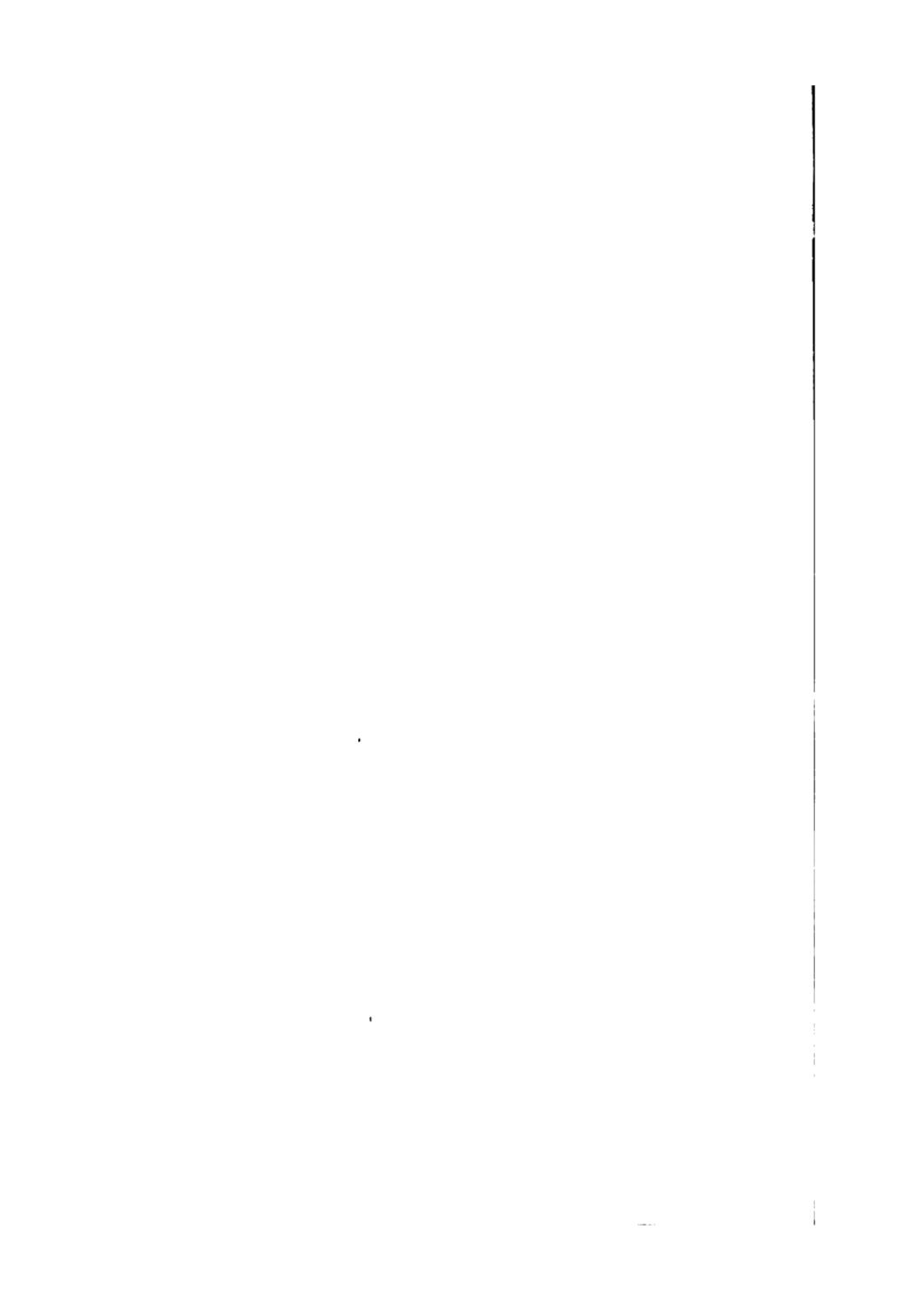
Drawn by T. Uwins.

Engraved by W. Sharp.

DAVID GARRICK.

*From a Picture by Gainsborough in the Town Hall
at Stratford upon Avon.*

The Highways of Literature p 148.



to us. As we look at him going through the representation with mobile countenance and flexible voice, we forget his own personality, and imagine that we see the different persons of the story appear, and speak, and act. This man is essentially a dramatist. He is really producing and at the same time acting a drama.

A drama may have one or other of two complexions. The dramatist may take a sombre view of human life. He may feel that man is the creature of a mysterious destiny, coming he knows not whence, going he knows not whither, having restless passions within himself which are ever bent upon hurrying him to ruin, surrounded by selfish fellow-creatures who are always ready to sacrifice him to their own interest, permeated and enveloped by the mysterious forces of nature which may crush him at a moment's warning, and drifting on slowly and inevitably to a dark and silent future. If the dramatist takes this view, he composes *tragedy*. But he may look at the brighter side of man's destiny. He may have the feeling that, after all, human life is not so very dismal. The world is full of sunshine, and flowers, and pleasant scenes, and happy creatures, and

genial men and women, and diverting foibles, and smiles and laughter. All these are God's gifts, and were intended for our good. Why should we not enjoy them, and laugh and be happy? It is our privilege, nay, our duty, to do so. If the dramatist takes this view, he writes *comedy*.

But whether he writes tragedy or comedy, the dramatist exercises a wonderful function. Other narrators give a mere description of an event. He, by the help of the actor, gives the event itself. They, at the very best, trace it faintly on the imagination of their hearers. He presents it before the hearers' very senses. It is a wonderful faculty which he has, and was surely intended for some very important end. What that end is, we shall now consider.

The end of some so-called dramas is empty amusement, and this end they achieve by burlesque, pantomime, farce, and every kind of tomfoolery. But what gives nothing save mere amusement, is not worthy to be classed under the designation of literature and to be called a drama. It is the legitimate drama, therefore, whose purpose we now proceed to discover.

If the question were asked, What kind of litera-

ture is most dissociated in the public mind from religion? the answer would be, 'the drama.' But strange to say, the drama owed its origin to religion. In Greece, India, China, it was originally a religious ceremony, and it was intended to promote religion. We can easily imagine how this happened. Let us suppose a large crowd of uncivilized people assembled to keep a holy festival. What is the method by which they could be made to participate in the ceremony? A speech addressed to them by the priest would not serve the purpose, for it would only be heard by a few. A hymn sung by a chorus would be more audible, but too monotonous. Some device would need to be tried which would appeal to the eye, and yet be sufficiently intelligible. The only way would be, to get up a dramatic action in which the actors would represent, if not in audible language, at least with expressive gestures, the wonderful deeds of the gods. This very naturally would be of the form of tragedy. But tragedy, as a matter of course, would be followed by comedy, just as in the present day, when a serious play becomes very popular, a burlesque of it is sure to spring up. Comedy, in fact, always accompanies tragedy as her shadow, and,

therefore, an exaggerated and grotesque likeness of her form. Hence it happened that comedy, too, came to be performed at the festivals as a religious ceremony.

But among the Greeks the drama, in course of time, ceased to be a religious ceremony; and when society became enlightened and refined, it became a work of art. The illustrious tragic writers, *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, *Euripides*, represented ideal heroes, demigods, and gods, doing great deeds, enduring great woes, and hurried on to their fate by a remorseless and all-controlling destiny. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, asserts that these writers had a great moral purpose in view, and that this purpose was to purge the minds of the audience through pity and terror—pity for the sufferings that they witnessed, and terror lest these sufferings should befall themselves. But this opinion may be questioned. The great dramatists, like the other Greek artists, had no other end in view than to represent ideal beauty or ideal grandeur; and in their eyes there was no grander spectacle than a hero, assailed by the pitiless storms of adverse fate, yet preserving his courage undaunted, and his dignity unruffled, and, when resistance was no longer possible,

submitting to his doom with sublime resignation. With the Greeks, therefore, in the height of their civilization, the drama was simply a work of art.

In the middle or dark ages the drama had ceased to be considered a work of art, when it occurred to Christian priests that it might be used as a means of teaching religion to the rude and unlettered mob who came to church on saints' days. Taking, therefore, the events of sacred history, they formed them into a kind of play which they called a *miracle* or *mystery*, and personated the biblical characters for the edification of the people. This kind of entertainment was first devised by Ezekiel, a Jew, in the second century. The first theatres were the churches, and the first actors were the priests themselves. But many were scandalized by the profane way in which the sacred doctrines were treated; and to satisfy these, the teaching of the drama was limited to morality. These plays, which were called *morallities*, were introduced into England in the reign of Henry VI. In them, personifications of the virtues and the vices were exhibited as models or warnings to the multitude.

To be a religious rite, to be a work of art, to teach

religion and morality,—these were the chief purposes which the drama was supposed to serve. But it will easily be seen, that not one of them is sufficiently comprehensive to exhaust all the capabilities of dramatic representation. It was reserved for Shakespeare to give, not only the most complete example, but also the most complete definition, of this species of composition. ‘The true end of playing,’ he says, ‘is to hold the mirror up to nature’—to hold the mirror up, not to a few people, or even to a nation, but to human nature, to the whole of humanity; to allow all classes, from the very highest to the very lowest, from Hamlet down to Caliban, to see their own image; to represent all kinds of men; in other words, to teach a complete knowledge of human character.

That this is the true purpose of the drama there can be no doubt. The drama is an imitative art, and imitates all kinds of people in all their different moods and actions. It represents, in other words, human character in all its phases. To illustrate this, let us contrast the drama with the other kinds of works that delineate man’s nature. We refer not to the Bible, which is the great exponent of the secrets

of the heart, but only to such uninspired works as histories, biographies, moral treatises, and novels. In these, as in a sort of anatomical museum, the various motives and actions of men are preserved, laid out, and labelled with more or less accuracy. But in a drama truthfully composed and acted, we have the complete living specimen overflowing with vitality and activity, and enveloped in the atmosphere and surrounded with the circumstances of the every-day world. Nor do we behold his outward form only. By means of the dialogues and soliloquies we can look into his very soul,—into the secret springs of his moral life,—we can see the master motives springing up, struggling with other motives, overcoming them, resulting in action, and bearing the fruit either of recompense or of retribution. To make this still clearer, let us suppose an intelligent and well-educated man who, owing to an unusual state of circumstances, has not read a drama, and has never so much as heard of the stage. One day he opens *Holinshed's Chronicle*, and there he reads how Macbeth was the kinsman and honoured general of Duncan, king of Scotland; how, on his return from a victory over the Danes, he was accosted by three

witches who hailed him as king ; how he was moved by ambition and murdered Duncan, and seized the crown ; and how he became a tyrant and a monster of cruelty, and was killed at last by Malcolm, Duncan's son. This story, though distinct, is tame, and makes no vivid impression on his mind. Then on the evening following he is taken, let us suppose, without any warning, to a theatre where Shakespeare's play of *Macbeth* is being acted. What a surprise awaits him ! Time seems to have run back for his special behoof. There, happening before his very eyes, is the very action about which he has been reading. There are the three witches, wild and withered, in their attire, with their choppy fingers upon their lips, hailing Macbeth as king. There is Macbeth himself, an honoured general, strong and soldier-like. There is Lady Macbeth with remorseless determination printed on every feature ; and as he looks, he views the different steps by which the valiant soldier is driven to his doom. He sees the start by which he first shows that he has conceived the ambition of being king. He sees the agony of his features while he fights against the temptation of his own heart, and the diabolical arguments of his wife. He sees

him, after the murder of Duncan, with the bloody daggers in his hands, perfectly paralyzed with terror. He beholds, too, that the accomplishment of his ambition brings no gratification. Fear and jealousy cloud his countenance amid the pomp, circumstance, and banquets of the palace. With pitiless mandates he sweeps every suspected person to destruction; and when perils thicken around him, the wild valour of despair seizes him, and he dies with 'harness on his back,' fighting like a fiend. Every one can see that by this dramatic exhibition the impression on the spectator's mind, which was but faint before, is made twentyfold more distinct. In fact, a great dramatist unconsciously follows the method of teaching so highly approved of in the present day by teachers of science. In the present day the teachers of science do not content themselves with giving their students mere descriptions of the processes of nature. They are not satisfied until they have made an experiment and shown these processes actually in operation. *Now the drama is nothing else than the teaching of the science of human nature by means of experiments.*

The purpose of the drama, then, is to teach a complete knowledge of human character. What an

all-important subject! To show its importance, let us imagine a man without this knowledge. What a sad failure he would be! Give him all other kinds of knowledge under the sun. Let him understand the stars, the various animals, the various plants, the minerals and strata of the earth. Let him have at his ready command all the tongues of men. Let him possess all the bearing and graces of an angel, and the golden thoughts and musical words of a poet. Yet without this knowledge of human nature, he would be the veriest fool; and all his other accomplishments would only hurry him the more readily into absurdity. He could not by any possibility conduct himself properly to those fellow-creatures whom he did not know. He would be at once a laughing-stock and a nuisance. Next to the knowledge of God, indeed, the knowledge of human character is the most important. Without it there could be no virtue. It is one of the foundations on which virtue must stand. If we do not know our own character, we cannot know our own failings; and if we do not know our failings, we cannot correct them. If we do not know our neighbour's character, we cannot know his virtues; and if we do not know his

virtues, we cannot act justly toward him. 'Know thyself,' was the maxim of the old Greek philosophy. 'Know thyself, and all thy fellow-creatures,' is the truer and wider maxim of a higher philosophy.

Having now ascertained the true end of the drama, we can tell how we ought to study it. If the end of the drama be to teach human character, our aim in reading it should be to learn human character. No doubt we should have other ends also in view. We should dwell upon the dramatist's words of beauty and power, and store our minds with his exquisite images and sentiments; but at the same time, our highest aim by far should be to study the characters he represents; and he who neglects this, is like the man who, when his attention was directed to a grand historical picture, fixed his eyes upon the gilded frame, and never once looked upon the glowing figures which were starting from the canvas.

The question still remains, What particular steps should we take while reading a drama in order to study the characters most thoroughly? Now, there is no doubt that to see the drama properly acted would aid us mightily. A drama, after all, is made to be acted, and when we see it being acted, we see

it in its natural state. And if we could get a company of actors like Mr. Irving, who becomes the very characters he represents, and exhibits the different phases of their nature with a vividness which could scarcely be surpassed, a flood of light could not fail to be thrown on any play which they represented. But this is impossible, and even if it were possible, there are many details in a drama which can best be mastered during our quiet meditation at our own fireside. We must in this, as in every other kind of study, depend mainly upon our own effort. Accordingly, in order to comprehend the characters, there are four steps which we ought to take.

We should *first* carefully read the drama. This is a very self-evident direction, but not at all unnecessary. If we take up a play of Shakespeare, specially prepared for school and college purposes, this seems to be the very last thing the student is expected to do. Before he reaches the text, he has to grope his way through tangled disquisitions, concerning the time when the play was written, concerning the date of its production on the stage, concerning the date of its publication, concerning the origin of its name, concerning the sources ascertained or imaginary from which the

plot was taken, concerning the nature of the verse in which it is written, and many other cognate subjects ; and when he arrives at last at the body of the play, he finds almost every line clogged with notes about grammar, analysis, etymology, historical references, parallel passages, and every other subject which is fitted to show that the editor is a man of erudition. We do not wonder at the fact that these plays are not popular with young people. The whole plan reminds us of a circumstance of which we have heard. An educational pedant had a luckless nephew upon whom he tried his theories, and into whom he was bent upon instilling general information in season and out of season—especially out of season. If the much-harassed youth was seated before a Christmas pie, like the legendary Horner, and about to attack it, he was stopped in the first flush of the onset by his didactic relative saying : 'Wait, my boy, till I enlighten you upon the origin of Christmas pies. The institution of Christmas pies is attributed by the spurious decretals to Telesphorus, who flourished in the reign of Antoninus, surnamed Pius,' and so on ; and when, like the self-complacent hero above mentioned, he pulled out a plum, he was arrested

again in his eager career: 'Allow me to examine that plum. The plum (Latin *prunus*) is the fruit of a genus of trees of the natural order *Rosaceæ*, sub-order *Amygdaleæ* or *Drupaceæ*,' etc., and so on, till the victimised youth hated Christmas pies and everything connected with them. The best way would have been to have allowed the eager lad to appease his hunger, and then, when his soul was satisfied and at peace, to have enlightened him upon those delicious viands which he had already appropriated, and was fast assimilating. In the same way we would say: Let the student begin at once to the text of the dramatist. Beyond the explanations that are absolutely necessary for the understanding of the sense, let no dissertation at first be given. Let him begin to read the play at once, and let him read it aloud, for even when it cannot be acted, it is at least intended to be recited. But above all, let it be read naturally. This is an advice very much neglected. It is *not* natural to read as if you were a machine, articulating each word in a uniform tone and at a uniform rate of velocity. It is *not* natural to read as if you were a humble bee, trying to escape out of a big bottle. It is *not* natural to read as if you were a dog whining

and howling at the moon. It is *not* natural to make men and women, innocent children and ruffians, all speak in the same tone. Reading must be made the work of the imagination. The reader must imagine himself to be in the scene of the drama, and then he must imagine himself to be in turn the different characters. Divesting himself of his own individuality, he must put on their circumstances, manners, and peculiarities ; and he must appropriate, and utter with his whole heart, their thoughts and feelings. Above all, he must imitate the voice and tone of each of them in turn. Now, we know that this style of reading is scorned and stigmatised by some people as theatrical. It may be theatrical, but it is certainly natural, and therefore right. Not only does it give to the hearers the idea of several people carrying on a conversation, not only does it make them sometimes fancy that they see the people ; but as, in ordinary speech, a skilful speaker can, by a slight change of tone, throw a whole world of new meaning into his words, so in elocution a skilful reader can, by the natural way in which he alters his voice while passing from one person's speech to that of another, produce a realistic effect which is really wonderful.

Take, for example, that dialogue between Lady Macduff and her little boy. It is considered so unimportant, that in the representation of the play it is generally omitted ; but when properly read, it gives a vivid idea of the innocent and playful happiness of that home which Macbeth so ruthlessly destroyed :

Lady Macduff. Sirrah, your father's dead ;
And what will you do now ? How will you live ?

Son. As birds do, mother.

L. Macd. What, with worms and flies ?

Son. With what I get, I mean ; and so do they.

L. Macd. Poor bird ! thou 'dst never fear the net, nor lime, The pitfall, nor the gin.

Son. Why should I, mother ? Poor birds they are not set for. My father is not dead, for all your saying.

L. Macd. Yes, he is dead ; how wilt thou do for a father ?

Son. Nay, how will you do for a husband ?

L. Macd. Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

Son. Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

L. Macd. Thou speak'st with all thy wit ; and yet, i' faith, With wit enough for thee.

Son. Was my father a traitor, mother ?

L. Macd. Ay, that he was.

Son. What is a traitor ?

L. Macd. Why, one that swears and lies.

Son. And be all traitors that do so ? [hanged.]

L. Macd. Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be

Son. And must they all be hanged, that swear and lie ?

L. Macd. Every one.

Son. Who must hang them ?

L. Macd. Why, the honest men.

Son. Then the liars and swearers are fools ; for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men, and hang up them.

L. Macd. Now God help thee, poor monkey ! But how wilt thou do for a father ?

Son. If he were dead, you'd weep for him : if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father.'

The *second* step we must take in order to understand the characters of a drama, is to study the plot. As the name indicates, the plot is the preparation that the dramatist makes for the development of the different characters ; and the grander the plot is, the grander are the characters which it calls forth. Hence Shakespeare, except in two instances, has laid all his plots at the courts of princes or reigning dukes, where the strongest impulses of humanity—ambition, intrigue, hate, love—are at work, and where all grades of men, from the king to the clown, are to be found. In fact, the plot is a connected account of all the circumstances and events which develop the characters ; and to understand the characters, we must understand the events which have developed them. We must therefore, after having read the whole play, come back and consider the plot. We must begin at the beginning of the chain of incidents of which it is composed, and passing along we must note how each link in the chain naturally follows what has gone before. We would even recom-

mend that each event should be written down in the order in which it comes. In this way we shall have all the facts clearly before our mind, and shall be better able to understand the workings of each particular character.¹ Take, as an instance, Lady Macbeth. When we have a faint recollection of the plot, the sleep-walking scene strikes us with a vague awe and nothing more. But when we bear in mind all the dreadful deeds of the murderer, what a terrible significance it has! It is sin becoming its own punishment. Like some monstrous and hideous offspring, it is constantly beside her, and cannot be destroyed. The record of her crime is written as if with fire upon her brain. She cannot get rid of it. It burns there perpetually. When her body is asleep, her mind is occupied with it, constantly going again and again through all the experiences of that dreadful night when the foul deed was done—the striking of the signal bell, the murky weather outside, the sight of the murdered king, the terror of her husband, the

¹ It is related that Mrs. Siddons, when waiting in her room, ready to go on the stage as Constance in *King John*, used to keep her door open that she might hear the play, and have all the influence of the events upon her mind before she began to speak.—*Life and Times of Charles Kean.*

knocking heard at the gate, and her hurried retreat to her chamber:

Lady Macbeth. Out, damned spot ! out, I say !—One, two : why, then 'tis time to do 't.—Hell is murky !—Fie, my lord, fie ! a soldier, and afraid ? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account ?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him !

Doctor. Do you mark that ?

Lady M. The thane of Fife had a wife ; where is she now ?—What, will these hands ne'er be clean ?—No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that ; you mar all with this starting.

Doct. Go to, go to ; you have known what you should not.

Gentlewoman. She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that : Heaven knows what she has known.

Lady M. Here's the smell of the blood still : all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.—Oh ! oh ! oh !

Doct. What a sigh is there ! The heart is sorely charged.

Gent. I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body.

Doct. Well, well, well—

Gent. Pray God it be, sir.

Doct. This disease is beyond my practice : yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds.

Lady M. Wash your hands, put on your night-gown ; look not so pale :—I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried ; he cannot come out on 's grave.

Doct. Even so ?

Lady M. To bed, to bed ; there's knocking at the gate : come, come, come, come, give me your hand ; what's done cannot be undone : to bed, to bed, to bed.'

The *third* step is to make a study of each character

by itself. How is this to be done? In the most natural and ordinary way. How do we study a man's character in everyday life? If we are wise, we place ourselves in his position, invest ourselves with his sentiments, look at things from his point of view, and thus form a charitable notion of his merits and defects. In the same way, when we are studying one of the *dramatis personæ*, we should throw ourselves heartily into his circumstances, think his thoughts, feel his emotions, and speak his words. And in order that we may not be merely sentimental but practical,—in order that we may estimate or calculate the contents of his character,—we should jot down his traits both good and bad. There is still another plan which, when practical, is very effective. That is the consideration of a man's antecedents, or, in other words, the circumstances which have moulded his present condition. By this plan we can see how his various qualities have sprung up, have been fostered, and have taken the shape they now have.¹ Now, strange to say, in the

¹ Lady Martin (Helen Faucit) follows this plan in her wonderfully exhaustive and appreciative estimate of Ophelia's character. See *Blackwood's Magazine* for April 1881.

case of Shakespeare's principal characters, their antecedents are generally either distinctly described or at least indicated. In the course of their soliloquies and dialogues they often let fall hints which reveal plainly enough that previous state of matters from which their present condition has arisen. Look, for instance, at Shylock. In his speech to Antonio, he tells, with stinging emphasis, that course of insolent and unjust treatment which had tended to make him the man that he was:

'Shylock. Signior Antonio, many a time and oft,
In the Rialto, you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances :
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug ;
For suffrance is the badge of all our tribe:
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well, then, it now appears you need my help :
Go to, then ; you come to me, and you say,
"Shylock, we would have moneys :"—you say so ;
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,
And foot me, as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold : moneys is your suit.
What should I say to you ? Should I not say,
"Hath a dog money ?" Is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats ?" or
Shall I bend low, and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath, and whispering humbleness,
Say this,—

"Fair sir, you spet on me on Wednesday last ;
You spurned me such a day ; another time
You called me dog ; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much moneys" ?'

The *fourth* step we must take is to try to verify the different characters. Mere book learning is not worth much. With the exception, perhaps, of a history, or of a romance, a book is a mere catalogue of things that exist or are supposed to exist in the actual world. If we wish to get the full use of this catalogue, we must not rest content with looking at the catalogue itself; we must look outside for the things catalogued. If, for example, we are studying a book on botany, we must not be satisfied with the mere description of a plant. We must seek for the plant itself in the woods and fields. In the same way, if we are anxious to get the full advantage of a dramatic representation of character, we must try to verify the character. We must ask: Is this character true? Have we ever heard of or seen any person like this? And, if the drama represents the great principles of human nature, the answer will be in the affirmative. We shall soon discover some one like the person represented. The likeness, of course, will not be exact in all its details, for

every great dramatist heightens or idealizes his characters, but in its essential elements it will be sufficiently marked. We could, for instance, if at all keen-sighted, see many of Shakespeare's characters living and moving amongst us in the nineteenth century garb, and with the Scottish accent. Without doubt there are some of them near us at this moment. Their peculiarities are not so striking, and their circumstances are not so arranged, as in the great creations of the dramatist. But they are essentially identical. To show this shortly, let us take for examples, Hamlet, the very highest character, and Caliban, the very lowest. We can easily see Hamlet in those men of morbidly active mind, who think so much and talk so much, who form so many theories, that they cannot decide upon any course of action unless driven on by sheer necessity; and we can, on the other hand, see Caliban in the degraded masses of large cities who seem half-men half-brutes, have no desires above the wants of the body, and whose every utterance is interlarded with curses.

We might even carry this scientific study of the drama one step further. In such sciences as botany,

geology, chemistry, there are guide-books, commonly called manuals or handy-books. If the student in the course of his everyday observation sees an object which he wishes to know more thoroughly, he consults this manual and finds a full description there. In the science of human nature, too, there is a manual. If the student notices in real life a class of people whose character he would like to know better, he can consult this manual, and he will find them fully described there. This manual is Shakespeare. Let us prove this by a few examples.

That this is true regarding the grander types of character, there can be no doubt. Critics all agree, that all the stronger passions which affect noble natures are represented in the pages of the great dramatist. For example, we have the following types of character depicted in the following personages:—A dignified, self-sacrificing patriot in Marcus Brutus; a brave, manly soldier, utterly corrupted by ambition, in Macbeth; a guileless, noble nature, driven to ruin by jealousy, in Othello; a hot-blooded despot, thwarted into madness, in King Lear; a revengeful man, completely carried away by his passion, in Shylock; a

thoroughgoing villain in King John; a spoiled, grown-up child, angry and tearful by turns, and blaming everybody for his misfortunes but himself, in Richard the Second; a reputed wit, compelled to be smart, and finding it easier to be so at other people's expense, in Benedick; and a practical philosopher, finding good everywhere, in the banished Duke. Then, again, an impatient nature, soured by deformity and ridicule, is depicted in Richard the Third:

'I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;—
Why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time
Unless to see my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity.
And, therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair, well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.'

An all-accomplished king, too, is represented in Henry the Fifth:

'Hear him but reason in divinity,
And all admiring with an inward wish
You would desire the king were made a prelate.'

Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
You would say,—it hath been all in all his study.
List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
A fearful battle rendered you in music.'

And last of all, we have in Prospero the portrait of a Christian philosopher, loving all things and bearing all things, and looking upon time itself as a dream, and eternity as the only waking reality:

'The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.'

All such grand representations we are prepared to find in Shakespeare. But we wish to show that the ordinary everyday classes of people are described there too.

There is a class of men constantly before the public. They are very ignorant of many things, but chiefly of their own defects and their neighbours' merits. As a result of this ignorance, there has grown up within them an irrepressible conceit, and they are always insisting upon setting other people right. It does not matter what the subject of discussion may be.

It may be theology, education, temperance, drainage, —up they start, mount the platform, and with brazen brow and leatherne lungs assume the leading part. Now, if we consult Shakespeare, we shall find their complete character in all its shallow, conceited, loud-voiced ignorance represented in Bottom, the weaver :

‘*Bottom*. First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on ; then read the names of the actors ; and so grow to a point.

Quince. Marry, our play is—The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby.

Bot. A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry.—Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll : Masters, spread yourselves.

Quin. Answer as I call you.—Nick Bottom, the weaver

Bot. Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

Quin. You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

Bot. What is Pyramus ? a lover or a tyrant ?

Quin. A lover, that kills himself most gallantly for love.

Bot. That will ask some tears in the true performing of it : if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes ; I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest :—Yet my chief humour is for a tyrant ; I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.

The raging rocks,
And shivering shocks,
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates ;
And Phibus' car
Shall shine from far,
And make or mar
The foolish fates.

This was lofty!—Now name the rest of the players.—This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is more condoling.

Quin. Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

Flute. Here, Peter Quince.

Quin. You must take Thisby on you.

Flu. What is Thisby? a wandering knight?

Quin. It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

Flu. Nay, faith, let not me play a woman; I have a beard coming.

Quin. That's all one; you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

Bot. An' I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too: I'll speak in a monstrous little voice:—"Thisne, Thisne,—Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! thy Thisby dear, and lady dear."

Quin. No, no, you must play Pyramus; and Flute, you Thisby.

Bot. Well, proceed.

Quin. Robin Starveling, the tailor.

Starveling. Here, Peter Quince.

Quin. Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother.—Tom Snout the tinker.

Snout. Here, Peter Quince.

Quin. You, Pyramus's father; myself, Thisby's father; Snug, the joiner, you the lion's part:—and I hope here is a play fitted.

Snug. Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

Quin. You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

Bot. Let me play the lion too; I will roar that I will make any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the duke say, "Let him roar again, let him roar again."

Quin. An' you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

All. That would hang us, every mother's son.

Bot. I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion than to

hang us ; but I will aggravate my voice so, that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove ; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale.

Quin. You can play no part but Pyramus ; for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man ; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day ; a most lovely, gentleman-like man ; therefore you must needs play Pyramus.'

We find a class of men stupid and illiterate who have been hoisted by chance or favour into office. Suspecting their own ignorance, they endeavour to hide it by assuming a pompous air and using big words. What does it matter although they do not know the meaning of them ? The sound is everything. You have often seen such men. If you turn to Shakespeare, you will find them done to the life in Dogberry :

'*Dogberry.* This is your charge : you shall comprehend all vagrom men ; you are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.

2 Watchman. How if a' will not stand ?

Dogb. Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go ; and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.

Verges. If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the prince's subjects.

Dogb. True, and they are to meddle with none but the prince's subjects.—You shall also make no noise in the streets ; for, for the watch to babble and talk, is most tolerable and not to be endured.

2 Watch. We will rather sleep than talk ; we know what belongs to a watch.

Dogb. Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman ; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend : only have a care that your bills be not stolen.—Well, you are to call at all the alehouses, and bid them that are drunk get them to bed.

2 Watch. How if they will not ?

Dogb. Why, then, let them alone until they are sober ; if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

2 Watch. Well, sir.

Dogb. If you meet a thief you may suspect him by virtue of your office to be no true man ; and, for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.

2 Watch. If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him ?

Dogb. Truly, by your office, you may ; but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled ; the most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company.

Verg. You have always been called a merciful man, partner.

Dogb. Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will ; much more a man who hath any honesty in him.

Verg. If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse, and bid her still it.

2 Watch. How if the nurse be asleep, and will not hear us ?

Dogb. Why, then, depart in peace, and let the child wake her with crying ; for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baes, will never answer a calf when he bleats.'

There is a particular kind of man not very rare. He has a long tongue and a small heart. He is terrific in speech, but mean in action. He breathes out volumes of threatenings one day, which he is

compelled to swallow the next. His inevitable fate is 'to eat the leek.' If we consult our manual, we shall find a full-length portrait of this gentleman as ancient Pistol eating the leek, not metaphorically but really :

'Fluellen. There is occasions and causes why and wherefore in all things : I will tell you, as my friend, Captain Gower : The rascally, scald, beggarly, lousy, pragging knave, Pistol,— which you and myself, and all the 'orl'd know to be no petter than a fellow, look you now, of no merits,—he is come to me, and brings me pread and salt yesterday, look you, and bid me eat my leek ; it was in a place where I could not breed no contentions with him ; but I will be so pold as to wear it in my cap till I see him once again, and then I will tell him a little piece of my desires.

Enter Pistol.

Gower. Why, here he comes, swelling like a turkey-cock.

Flu. 'Tis no matter for his swellings nor his turkey-cocks. Got pless you, ancient Pistol ! thou scurvy, lousy knave, Got pless you !

Pistol. Ha ! art thou Bedlam ? dost thou thirst, base Trojan, To have me fold up Parca's fatal web ?

Hence ! I am qualmish at the smell of leek.

Flu. I peseech you heartily, scurvy, lousy knave, at my desires, and my requests, and my petitions, to eat, look you, this leek ; because, look you, you do not love it, nor your affections, and your appetites and your digestions, does not agree with it, I would desire you to eat it.

Pist. Not for Cadwallader and all his goats.

Flu. There is one goat for you. (*Strikes him.*) Will you be so goot, scald knave, as eat it ?

Pist. Base Trojan, thou shalt die.

Flu. You say very true, scald knave, when Got's will is ; I will desire you to live in the meantime, and eat your victuals ; come, there is sauce for it (*striking him again*). You called me yesterday, mountain-squire, but I will make you to-day a squire of low degree. I pray you, fall to ; if you can mock a leek, you can eat a leek.

Gow. Enough, captain ; you have astonished him.

Flu. I say, I will make him eat some part of my leek, or I will peat his pate four daya.—Bite, I pray you ; it is good for your green wound, and your bloody coxcomb.

Pist. Must I bite ?

Flu. Yes, certainly ; and out of doubt, and out of questions too, and ambiguities.

Pist. By this leek, I will most horribly revenge ; I eat—and eat—I swear.

Flu. Eat, I pray you : will you have some more sauce to your leek ? there is not enough leek to swear by.

Pist. Quiet thy cudgel ; thou dost see I eat.

Flu. Much goot do you, scald knave, heartily. Nay, pray you, throw none away ; the skin is goot for your proken coxcomb. When you take occasions to see leeks hereafter, I pray you, mock at 'em ; that is all.

Pist. Good.

Flu. Ay, leeks is goot :—Hold you, there is a groat to heal your pate.

Pist. Me a groat !

Flu. Yes, verily and in truth, you shall take it ; or I have another leek in my pocket which you shall eat.'

We see every day young people, especially boys, too full of animal spirits. They are, in fact, so full of fun that they must give vent to it, and they practise upon any harmless person near them. They feel so happy themselves, that they must make some

person miserable. The more harmless their victims are, the more they delight in showing their skill in tormenting them. This mischief-making class we shall find depicted to the very life in Grumio :

Grumio. Nay, forsooth, I dare not, for my life.

Katharine. The more my wrong, the more his spite appears.
What I did he marry me to famish me ?

Beggars that come unto my father's door,

Upon entreaty, have a present alms ;

If not, elsewhere they meet with charity :

But I, who never knew how to entreat,

Nor never needed that I should entreat,

Am starv'd for meat, giddy for lack of sleep ;

With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed.

And that which spites me more than all these wants,

He does it under name of perfect love ;

As who should say, if I should sleep or eat,

'Twere deadly sickness, or else present death.

I prithee go, and get me some repast ;

I care not what, so it be wholesome food.

Grum. What say you to a neat's foot ?

Kath. 'Tis passing good ; I prithee let me have it.

Gru. I fear it is too choleric a meat ;

What say you to a fat tripe finely broiled ?

Kath. I like it well ; good Grumio, fetch it me.

Gru. I cannot tell ; I fear 'tis choleric.

What say you to a piece of beef and mustard ?

Kath. A dish that I do love to feed upon.

Gru. Ay, but the mustard is too hot a little.

Kath. Why, then the beef, and let the mustard rest.

Gru. Nay, then I will not ; you shall have the mustard,
Or else you get no beef of Grumio.

Kath. Then both or one, or anything thou wilt.

Gru. Why, then the mustard without the beef.

Kath. Go, get thee gone, thou false deluding slave,

(Beats him.)

That feed'st me with the very name of meat;

Sorrow on thee, and all the pack of you,

That triumph thus upon my misery!

Go, get thee gone, I say.'

We might have multiplied examples, but we have done enough to show that in the drama, and especially in that of Shakespeare, there is a vast store of valuable and entertaining knowledge regarding our common humanity.







Engraving by Mr.

W. F. Yeoman

C I C E R O.

The Highways of Literature, p 183.



CHAPTER VII.

ORATORY.

WE are a free people. We govern ourselves, or rather, we tell our rulers how they are to govern us. In order to do this, we must meet in public assembly, and discuss those questions that affect the commonwealth, and ascertain what is the opinion of the majority. Public speaking, or oratory, or (as Carlyle somewhat irreverently calls it) 'wind and tongue,' has become a necessity. It is learned and practised as an art. Have we not numberless debating societies, where sagacious and solemn politicians of some fifteen or sixteen winters discuss such new questions as: 'Was Mary Queen of Scots guilty of the murder of her husband?' and, 'Was Cromwell justified in beheading Charles the First?' Nay, have we not in most of our large towns a mimic House of Commons, where embryo statesmen

practise those oratorical arts which they hope to display on the floor of St. Stephen's—a mimic House of Commons, where the Speaker is dignified and serious, as if the fate of empires depended upon his nod, where the Government is wary and provokingly uncommunicative, and where the Opposition is patriotic, indignant, and denunciatory? And when a parliamentary election is to take place, what a storm of eloquence is let loose throughout the country! There are just two sets of opinions, those of the Government and those of the Opposition; and these have been so clearly and so frequently stated in the newspapers, that there is no necessity for any repetition of them. But in every town-hall and village schoolroom, the candidates and the up-holders of the candidates think it necessary to retail the same vapid commonplaces. It is what their country expects. Long ago a British patriot was bound either to do or die. Now he is bound to perform a much simpler thing. He is only bound to speak in public.

Instead, therefore, like Carlyle, of railing against all public speaking whatever, we must accept it as a necessity, and try to make the most of it. Let us ascertain, then, in the first place, what is true speaking as dis-

tinguished from false ; real eloquence as distinguished from mere talk. In other words, let us find out who are the sham orators and who are the true orators.

Who are the sham orators ? We would divide them into three classes.

The *first* is the twaddler, the man who talks mere nothings in a blundering and dreary way. He is seen in his most developed state at a public dinner-table. There the Britons (such is their inconsistency) think it necessary to torture a fellow-being by compelling him to speak, and to torture themselves by entailing upon themselves the necessity of listening. Their victim is generally a harmless, simple soul, who would have as soon thought of flying as of making speeches, if vile custom had not driven him to it. He is happy at the social board with his friends, his soul is filled with the sense of good things, and his countenance is all aglow with geniality, when, without a moment's warning, he is called upon to stand up and make a fool of himself. As long as he remains in a sedentary position, ideas are in his head, and have no difficulty in finding their way out in the form of speech. But no sooner does he rise up, than these

ideas seem to slip down—where they go we cannot say—and his head is left empty. He mumbles some hackneyed phrases, such as: ‘Unexpectedly called upon,’ ‘Some one better able to do justice to the subject,’ ‘This joyful occasion,’ etc. He moves his glass deliberately from his left to his right; and this looks so like clearing his way that we grow sanguine, and expect to see him make a good start. He puts his hand into his pocket; and a mad hope seizes us that he may have some ideas carefully stowed away there. But it is all in vain. He is soon utterly at sea, and we look on in torturing suspense, expecting every moment to see him sink. However, Providence is kind. There are always floating about some well-known phrases, the wrecks of former after-dinner speeches. He clutches at these, and is kept from sinking; and by and by, besides being buoyed up, he finds that he can even move with some degree of ease and comfort. ‘He is as the ass, whom you take and cast headlong into the water; the water at first threatens to swallow him; but he finds to his astonishment that he can swim therein, that it is buoyant, and bears him along. One sole condition is indispensable: audacity, vulgarly called impudence.

Our ass must *commit* himself to his watery "element;" in free daring, strike forth his four limbs from him; then shall he not drown and sink, but shoot gloriously forward, and swim, to the admiration of bystanders. The ass, safe landed on the other bank, shakes his rough hide, wonderstruck himself at the faculty that lay in him, and waves joyfully his long ears.'¹

The *second* sham orator is the man of the 'sounding-brass type,' the *vox et præterea nihil*, the whiner, or the howler, or the ranter. He may have a small modicum of meaning to communicate, but he gives very little heed to that. It is the manner more than the matter, the sound more than the sense, to which he attends. It is the ear more than the understanding that he addresses. He is a mere bell, empty of everything but a long tongue, and capable of uttering nothing but a vague sound. And yet this sing-song style, unnatural though it may be, has a wonderful effect. It is like an incantation handed down from remote antiquity. In the *first* place, it has a striking effect upon the speaker himself, giving him a never-failing fluency. He may utter nothing but what is worthless, he may go on

¹ Carlyle's Essay on *Count Cagliostro*.

adding commonplace to commonplace, in the style of an inventory, and piling up what Dickens calls 'verbose flights of stairs,' but he pours into the ears of his audience an uninterrupted flood of musical sound. He completely avoids at least *one* fatal defect in an orator, namely, hesitation. For instance, Chadband, in his famous address to the London Arab, Jo, without having a single valuable idea to stir his mind, but intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, is borne along triumphantly through an eloquent rhapsody: 'For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy! Oh! glorious to be a human boy!' . . .

'O running stream of sparkling joy,
To be a soaring, human boy!'

This kind of eloquence, too, in the *second* place, has a great and varied effect upon the hearers. In the case of some, it lulls the understanding into a sort of pleasing, half-waking consciousness, that everything in the universe is going right, and that there is no necessity for harassing thought. Tennyson's 'Northern Farmer' tells us that before his

wife's death he always went to Parson's church, that he heard him bumming like a cockchafer above his head, that he did not understand him in the least, but that he came away with the impression that everything was what it ought to be :

'An' I hallus comed to's choorch afoor moy Sally wur deäd,
An' 'eerd un a bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard-clock ower my
yeäd,
An' I niver knaw'd whot a meän'd, but I thowt a 'ad summút
to saäy,
An' I thowt a said whot a owt to 'a said, an' I coomed awaäy.'

In other cases it acts like 'a drowsy syrup' upon the body and sends it to sleep. 'D'ye ken so-and-so ?' said one Scotchman to another. 'Ken him ! for the last fowre years we've sleepit in the same kirk.' But in a few cases this eloquence really seems to touch the feelings. A poor woman had gone to hear Whitfield when he was preaching in Edinburgh. She returned in a state of almost speechless admiration. 'How did you like him ?' her friends asked. 'Oh !' —she could not express her feelings. What was his text ? 'Oh !' —she could not tell. What was he preaching about ? 'Oh !' —she did not remember. What made you like him then ? 'Oh !' she said, 'the sough of that blessed word Me-so-po-taw-mi-a !'

The *third* kind of sham orator is the special pleader, the spokesman of a party, the retailer of occasional sophistry, or what the Americans call 'bunkum.' The most perfect specimens of this class were the old Greek sophists. They frankly admitted that they owed no allegiance to truth, and that, in their opinion, truth must accommodate itself to the wants of man; and one even declared that 'Oratory must say "good-bye" to truth.' But there are not wanting representatives of this same class in the present day. We do not include under this head the special pleaders at the bar, the barristers or advocates. They are following a necessary calling. They are pleading for those who cannot plead for themselves; and it is perfectly well understood that they are speaking, not their own sentiments, but those of their clients. But the spokesman of a party, religious, social, or political, often belongs to a different class. Not by conviction, but by the accident of birth, education, or circumstance, he finds himself the champion of a particular set of opinions. If these opinions are altogether true (a state of matters very unlikely), he is a most fortunate person, the official advocate

of the truth. But if they are, as is most probable, partly true and partly false, then he is of all men the most unfortunate. He is not like a free and intelligent human being, taking a wide survey of the universe, looking before and after, and choosing out for himself the paths of rectitude. But he is like a mill-horse with blinkers on, condemned to fix his gaze upon the narrow track before him, and to plod on, apparently going forward, but in reality going round and round in the same contracted circle. Such a man is bound to keep to his own walk, and to defend it to the death against all comers. It does not matter how unfair or dishonourable the weapons he employs may be. The end justifies the means. If the facts of history are brought against him, he unblushingly seizes them, twists and disfigures them, and holding them up, loudly asserts that they mean the very reverse of what they are generally supposed to mean. If reasons fail him, he forthwith shapes some high-sounding cries, such as, 'The symmetry of the British constitution,' 'Religion in danger,' 'English ends by English methods,' all of which are echoed from mouth to mouth, and are mistaken by the

simple for strong arguments. If a statement of his views is demanded, he expresses or rather conceals his meaning in cunningly-devised phrases, which look like great axiomatic truths bearing their evidence in their face. And when these arts fail, he has others in reserve. Ever cool, ready, ingenious, and bold, he can delight his friends by his brilliant metaphors, annihilate his enemies by his jibes and happy nicknames, and play upon the superstitions and prejudices of the nation, until he sets it in a roar of excitement. The whole process is intended, not to enlighten the public, but to prevent it from seeing. It is what is vulgarly, but at the same time graphically, called, 'Throwing dust in the eyes.' If this is the true end of oratory, we might agree with the American author when he said, 'The curse of a country is its eloquent men.'

Such are the different kinds of false orators. But who is the *true* orator? *He who, with the language of his own earnest soul, rouses the multitude to noble action.* The effect which he produces is like a miracle. Here he is, a solitary man; and there, facing him, is a multitude brimful of ignor-

ance, superstition, and perhaps hostility towards himself. With nothing but his voice, he has to change that seething mass of humanity, and make it obedient to his will. And how easily he does it! His clear, fervid soul goes forth in simple, burning words, enters into the hearts and understandings of his hearers, until they gradually grow to be of the same mind with himself—until, in fact, they have been fused into one great body, animated by his spirit. He has multiplied his being a thousand-fold,—he has extended his being into one great united army, ready to fight the battle of the Truth.

The particular qualifications of an orator have been fully analysed by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian among the ancients, and by Campbell, Whately, and Spalding among the moderns. Aristotle has been especially minute. He has described the different subjects on which orators speak, the different kinds of men to whom they appeal, the different motives which they excite, the different arguments which they use for proof, the different figures which they use for illustration, and the different kinds of words which they employ. But all these nice distinctions, though they serve the

end of philosophical completeness, are useless for practical purposes :

‘For all a rhetorician’s rules
Teach nothing but to name his tools.’

An orator on the eve of beginning a speech could not recollect all these rules ; and even although he could do so, the very effort would distract his mind from that complete absorption in his subject which is the very foundation of all rhetorical success. A few general principles are all that need be observed.

Of these general principles some are very well known, and are obeyed by all practised orators whether false or true. It is perfectly well known, for example, that a speaker should be master of his subject ; that he should have it all clearly arranged before he begins to speak ; that he should adapt his style to the nature of the audience ; that his language should be clear, fluent, and musical ; and that his gestures should be simple and manly, and not so obtrusive as to draw away the attention of the hearers from his ideas. But there are certain other qualifications which have not been so

generally recognised. These are the characteristics of every *true* orator; it is by these that he is distinguished from one that is *false*; and we now proceed to notice each of these in turn.

1. A true orator must have *a message*—that is, *some great truth that he is bound to proclaim*. By his very nature he is a leader, a king. He must guide and command. He must therefore occupy a high standpoint, take a wide survey of life, and see clearly the various paths by which men walk. He must, indeed, be a beacon, placed on high, and shedding down a steady light upon the travellers below. If he does not occupy this lofty position, he is at best but a wandering fire, a will-o'-the-wisp; and the sooner he disappears the better for the public. A dull man once intimated to his friend that he was about to study for the ministry. ‘What is your reason?’ said his friend. ‘That I may glorify God by preaching the gospel.’ ‘My dear fellow, you will best glorify God by holding your tongue.’

In Old Testament times, the Jewish prophets, when preparing for a public career, used to retire to

solitary places—to the caves of the rock, or the hollow bosom of the hills, or the depths of the wilderness. There, gazing upon the grand movements of the universe, and musing upon the history of the human race, they became acquainted with the ways of God in nature and in providence. Inspiration came upon them; they felt themselves filled, possessed with a divine message; and returning to the haunts of men, they proclaimed this message to the nation with a voice like a trumpet. Some, like Isaiah, rapt away by sublime enthusiasm, addressed themselves to the universe, and called upon the heavens and the earth to listen to the word of the Lord.

In the same way, one who aspires to be a true orator must study the ways of God in nature, in history, and in society. He must enter so far into the mind of God, and understand to a certain extent the great laws by which the universe is ruled. He must, in plain language, know the truth, and nothing but the truth, regarding the subject about which he is to speak. Facts—real, distinct facts—must be the substance of the speech. The feeling of a speech may, according to Whately, be compared to the edge of a sabre; but the back of the sabre—that

which gives consistency and strength and weight—must be the facts.

When an orator proclaims these great eternal truths, he cannot fail to produce a mighty effect. Though bishops or presbyteries may not have laid their consecrating hands upon his head, though he may be merely a lecturer on literature or science, yet he is really a preacher. He speaks not his own message, but the message of God; and he speaks it with a voice of power, for he feels that it is backed by the weight of the universe, nay, by the Divine Spirit Himself. Self is sunk, and the subject possesses him. You see the inspiration in the brightening of his countenance, in the flash of his eye, in the thrill of his voice, in the commanding vigour of his gestures; and meanwhile his speech flows forth, clear and strong, like a river let loose from the living rock, sometimes rushing down the steep, and sweeping before it all obstructions, sometimes flowing majestically along the level lands, but always borne along by that same omnipotent force of gravity, which rolls the planets round the sun, and holds together the boundless system of the universe.

2. A true orator must have *sympathy*. He stands between heaven and earth. While he enters into God's mind and gathers His thoughts, he brings them down to men. He is the medium in which God and men meet. But to raise men up, he must stoop down to them. He must, in other words, sympathise with them. This power of sympathy is one of the gifts of a true orator. Partly by instinct and partly by experience, he understands his audience, knows their thoughts and feelings, their virtues and their weaknesses, what they can take in, and what they cannot take in. He makes himself part of them, adding their being, as it were, to his own. He becomes their mouthpiece, ready to utter clearly and distinctly their ideas and sentiments. That he is actually in living contact with them is proved by the fact that he is affected by their moral temperature. If they are cold and impassive, he becomes spiritless. If they are intelligent and enthusiastic, he waxes warm and eloquent. Nay, we are inclined to hold that there is such a thing as animal magnetism, and that it passes rapidly from the speaker, through the audience, and back again to the speaker. How is

it, that, when the audience is packed closely together and the speaker is close to them, the effect is the greatest ? It is because the circuit is complete, and the electrical current passes freely without any hindrance. How is it, that, when there are gaps in the audience, and the speaker is far away, the effect is very much impaired ? Simply because the electrical current is interrupted. What is that applause which bursts forth at intervals, and which delights and inspirits the speaker ? It is the noise which the electricity makes as it flashes from him, through the audience, and back again to him, making him feel that the circuit is complete. 'I care not,' said an orator, 'how small my audience is, if it is packed close in a small room, and with one or two persons standing.'

Such is the sympathy which a true speaker has with his audience; and you can easily see what a mighty power it must give to him. His being is for the time really enlarged. He is thinking and feeling for an immense corporate body. It is their voice that he is lifting up; it is their sentiments that he is uttering. Hence he speaks with a force and an authority increased a thousandfold. 'The

orator,' says Mr. Gladstone, ' bears the same relation to his audience that the sky bears to the earth. He receives from them in the form of vapour what he afterwards gives back in the form of rain ;' and we would add, ' not only in the form of rain, but sometimes in the form of thunder and lightning.'

It was this sympathy that gave Chatham his transcendent success as an orator. He was a modern Demosthenes. As Demosthenes felt and spoke for Greece, so Chatham felt and spoke for England. Investing himself with England's honour, majesty and matchless love of freedom, he spoke with a power which literally overwhelmed all opposition :

' In him Demosthenes was heard again,
Liberty taught him her Athenian strain ;
She clothed him with authority and awe,
Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law.
His speech, his form, his action full of grace,
And all his country shining in his face,
He stood as some inimitable hand
Would strive to make a Paul or Tully stand.
No sycophant or slave that dared oppose
Her sacred cause, but trembled when he rose,
And every venal stickler for the yoke
Felt himself crushed at the first word he spoke.

One of the most practical results of this sympathy is that the speaker, as he proceeds, is able to adapt

himself to circumstances. He sees or rather feels instinctively whether he is producing the effect he intended, and he can change his style accordingly. 'I very soon discovered,' said Sheridan, 'that three-fourths of the House of Commons were fools, and so I did not waste arguments upon them, but confined myself to the most direct statements.' A barrister at a trial, who had just finished an address to the jury, was taken to task by a friend for repeating some of his arguments. 'Do you,' said the barrister, 'observe the foreman, that heavy-looking fellow in a yellow waistcoat? No more than one idea could ever stay in his thick head at a time; and I resolved that mine should be that idea. So I hammered on till I saw by his eyes that he had got it.'

3. A true orator must have *vividness*. Burke says that oratory must be 'half-prose, half-poetry.' Cicero asserts that an orator must not only be a logician and a philosopher, but also a poet and an actor. This is true. A true orator, from his very nature, is in love with the truth he is about to proclaim. And love in this case, as in every other case, opens his eyes to the excellence of the beloved

object. Its image haunts him by night and by day, and is constantly before him. He cannot get rid of it; he is possessed by it. He becomes, in fact, what is called, in old English phrase, *a seer*, that is, one who sees, and he sees the truths he is in love with so distinctly that he is eager to make his audience see them too. Now, in doing this, ordinary language sometimes breaks down under him, and will not serve his purpose. He therefore, in his anxiety to be vivid, resorts to two bold devices. *First* of all, instead of appealing to the understanding merely, he appeals to the imagination. Instead of making a mere statement, he presents a picture. In other words, he uses a figure of speech. For example, Burke, in denouncing the taxing of the American colonies, is not content with simply saying that it is dangerous to attempt to tax the Americans. He makes his warning far more striking by conjuring up a vivid image. 'We are shearing,' he says, 'not a sheep, but a wolf.' Raleigh, too, in his *History of the World*, while referring to the fact that all difficulties, troubles, and evils are eventually removed by death, presents death in the likeness of an all-powerful potentate, and exclaims: 'O eloquent, just, and

mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none have dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised: thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet.*' But in the *second* place, an orator not only appeals to the imagination, but sometimes to the very senses. He becomes, in other words, an actor. There is, we know, a strong objection to the introduction of any of the tricks of the theatre into oratory. Cowper, in speaking about preaching, cries out:

‘Therefore, avaunt, all attitude and stare,
And start theoretic practised at the glass.’

Yet it is perfectly certain that cases often occur in a speech when a little acting is not only effective, but necessary. Two persons, for instance, are sometimes introduced as holding a dialogue, and the exact words of each are reported. It would be not only absurd but unnatural, to represent these two people as speaking exactly in the same tone and manner. Therefore the speaker gives to

each a different voice and bearing; and thus, by a slight change of gesture and speech, the great orator can make his audience, to a certain extent, see and hear the persons that are represented as talking.

4. A great orator must have *fervour*. In the physical world, force can be resolved into heat. It is the same in the spiritual world. The whole truths which the orator contemplates stir all the faculties of his soul into intense action, and this intense action takes the form of heat—of fervour. His tone may be low or high, his enunciation may be rapid or slow, his language may be plain or figurative, but in any case the fervour is apparent. His face glows, his eyes sparkle, his words burn, and his very sentences are poured forth in an easy and continuous flow as if they were molten. The whole man is on fire.

An orator on fire very soon affects his hearers. The most combustible among them are kindled by the shower of burning words that falls upon them. They are softened, are melted, become plastic, and are ready to take almost any shape. They are

completely under the control of the speaker. It is said that the eloquence of St. Bernard was so captivating that mothers hid their sons, and wives hid their husbands, lest he should draw them away into a monastery.

This fervour of the true orator is often imitated by the false. But the base imitation is easily detected. The fire of the true orator is fed with solid thoughts, and sheds a steady and lasting glow. The fire of the false orator is fed with chaff, and after a momentary flicker goes out, leaving nothing but smoke.

A notable instance of a fervid speaker was Dr. Chalmers. His mind was an intensely active volcano that discharged its contents with resistless force — words all ablaze, and 'arguments like fragments of burning mountains.' One of his most effective speeches was that on the Catholic Emancipation Bill, delivered in the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, in March 1829. When we read it now in cold blood, it seems, indeed, almost commonplace. But let us place ourselves in the position of the speaker; let us fill our hearts with that intense feeling under the influence of which

he spake; let us realize that holy enthusiasm with which he regarded the Bible as that miraculous spell of God which dispelled the mists of ignorance and superstition, shed sunshine and comfort upon the earth, and opened the gates of heaven, and transformed man from a grovelling savage into a child of light and an heir of immortality; let us, in other words, rekindle under the sentences their former fires, and we shall see how brilliant and effective they are. He was supporting the bill, not because of his indifference to popery, but because of his confidence in the truth, and he proceeded to say:

‘A far more befitting honour to the great cause is the homage of our confidence; for what Sheridan says of the liberty of the press, admits of most emphatic application to the religion of truth and liberty. “Give,” says that great orator, “to ministers a corrupt House of Commons, give to them a pliant and docile House of Lords, give to them the keys of the Treasury and the patronage of the Crown, and give me the liberty of the press, and with this mighty engine I will overthrow the fabric of corruption, and establish upon its ruins the rights

and privileges of the people." In like manner, give the Catholics of Ireland their emancipation, give them a seat in the Parliament of the country, give them a free and equal participation in the politics of the realm, give them a place at the right ear of Majesty and a voice in his counsels, and give me the circulation of the Bible, and with this mighty engine I will overthrow the tyranny of antichrist, and establish the fair and original form of Christianity on its ruins.'

5. A great orator must have *a high personal character*. In March 1880, a gentleman went to the Music Hall, Edinburgh, to hear a great orator. 'I did not believe,' he said, 'in his politics; but when, amid a perfect tempest of applause, the veteran statesman appeared on the platform, and I saw before me the man who for the last fifty years had been before the public as a most earnest thinker and worker, who had kept his mind open on all sides to the truth, and had never been ashamed to confess when he was in the wrong, who had during his leisure moments ranged with avidity the whole provinces of literature and science, whose eloquent

voice on great emergencies had sounded like a clarion through Europe, cheering the heart of the poor political prisoner in his dungeon, and making the tyrant quake upon his throne, and who, at the age of threescore and ten, was as active and enthusiastic as ever, and ready to do battle for his convictions against all comers,—when, I say, I saw this man, and remembered what he had done and what he was still anxious to do, I was half-converted to his opinions even before he opened his lips.' 'Of eloquence,' says Channing, 'there is but one fountain, and that is inward life—force of thought and force of feeling.' Aristotle also says: 'There are three causes of a speaker deserving belief; and these are prudence, excellence, and the having our interests at heart.' Personal character, therefore, is the most essential of all the orator's qualifications. Without it, the others would fall short of the effect. It is the proof; the others are merely the propositions. It is the example; the others are merely the precept. It is the sterling gold; the others are merely the promissory notes. It is the substance; the others are merely the shadow which the substance casts before. Character—high personal

character—must, in the end, clench all the orator's able arguments and stirring appeals. He must be—and not only be, but appear to the audience manifestly to be—modest, wise, and above all, brimful of sympathy and philanthropy.

In this qualification, the prophets, apostles, and martyrs of old had great advantage over men of the present day. Their lives—what they had suffered and what they were still prepared at a moment's notice to suffer—spoke trumpet-tongued. What an impressive figure Paul must have been to an audience who knew something of his history! For his Divine Master's sake he had given up his home, his kindred, his profession, and had become an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth. He had been shipwrecked, imprisoned, scourged, stoned, almost torn to pieces by the mob, tossed into the bloody arena to fight with wild beasts. As he stood before his audience in his poor travel-stained garments, with his body wasted by hunger, his hands hard with toil, his face marred by manifold suffering, and, above all, his eyes glowing with holy zeal, he must have been a living sermon full of pathos and of power. No wonder that,

aided by the grace of God, he stirred the Roman empire to its depth, and, in the phrase of his enemies, 'turned the world upside down.'

Such are the special qualifications of a true orator. A most important question, however, still remains to be answered: How should we study orations which we do not hear delivered, but which we can only see in a written form? In other words, how is oratory as a branch of literature to be studied? The answer is simple. An oration, as we have seen, depends very much for its effect upon the circumstances amid which it is spoken. There are, therefore, several circumstances which we must always consider: the character of the speaker, the conditions under which the speech is spoken, and the character of the audience to whom it is addressed.

We must recall all these. We must make them live again. Then, imagining that we are the speaker addressing under certain circumstances a certain audience, we must speak the speech aloud. We shall thus be able to revive it, and to see somewhat of its original force and beauty. For instance, let us suppose that we wish to appreciate thoroughly

what may be called the greatest speech in our language, namely, Mark Antony's oration in Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. *First* of all, we put on the character of Antony: we imagine ourselves, for the time being, the voluptuous, crafty, and accomplished Antony. In the *second* place, we fancy ourselves breathing that atmosphere of excitement which was the result of Cæsar's murder and of the proclamation of freedom by Brutus and Cassius. In the *third* place, we try to conjure up before us the Roman mob, that idle, selfish, many-headed monster. Then, *last* of all, under the influence of all these imaginings, we read the oration aloud. By doing all this, we see the wonderful art, force, and beauty of the whole speech. The orator, we see, first tries to conciliate the mob by agreeing with them that Cæsar was ambitious, but, at the same time, reminds them of certain well-known facts which seem to show that he was not ambitious. The very mention of these facts affects him so much that he is obliged to pause; and while he pauses, he ascertains from the remarks around him that the audience has been brought over to his side. He next proceeds to work them up into the highest state of excitement, by

raising one of the strongest passions in human nature, namely, curiosity. He holds up Cæsar's will, refuses to read it, but hints that Cæsar has made them his heirs. They are now in love with Cæsar; but this is not enough, he must make them hate his murderers. This he does by holding up Cæsar's mantle, and pointing out the holes made by the daggers of the assassins, and last of all by throwing back the shroud and showing them the mangled corpse :

'Antony. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ;

I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them ;
The good is oft interred with their bones ;
So let it be with Cæsar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious :
If it were so, it was a grievous fault ;
And grievously hath Cæsar answered it.
Here, under leave of Brutus, and the rest,
(For Brutus is an honourable man ;
So are they all, all honourable men ;)
Come I to speak in Cæsar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me.
But Brutus says he was ambitious ;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransom did the general coffers fill :
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious ?
When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept ;

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff :
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition ?
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause ;
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him ?
O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason !—Bear with me ;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

1 *Citizen.* Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

2 *Cit.* If thou consider rightly of the matter,
Caesar has had great wrong.

3 *Cit.* Has he, masters ?
I fear there will a worse come in his place.

4 *Cit.* Marked ye his words ? He would not take the
crown ;
Therefore, 'tis certain he was not ambitious.

1 *Cit.* If it be found so, some will dear abide it.

2 *Cit.* Poor soul ! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

3 *Cit.* There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.

4 *Cit.* Now mark him, he begins again to speak.

Ant. But yesterday, the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world ; now lies he there,
And none so poor to do him reverence.

O masters ! if I were disposed to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honourable men :
I will not do them wrong ; I rather choose

To wrong the dead, to wrong myself, and you,
 Than I will wrong such honourable men.
 But here's a parchment with the seal of Cæsar.
 I found it in his closet, 'tis his will ;
 Let but the commons hear this testament,
 (Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,)
 And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds,
 And dip their napkins in his sacred blood ;
 Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
 And, dying, mention it within their wills.
 Bequeathing it, as a rich legacy,
 Unto their issue.

4 *Cit.* We'll hear the will : read it, Mark Antony.

Citizens. The will, the will ! we will hear Cæsar's will.

Ant. Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read
 it ;

It is not meet you know how Cæsar loved you.
 You are not wood, you are not stones, but men ;
 And, being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,
 It will inflame you, it will make you mad :
 'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs ;
 For if you should, O, what would come of it !

4 *Cit.* Read the will ; we'll hear it, Antony ;
 You shall read us the will ; Cæsar's will.

Ant. Will you be patient ? will you stay awhile ?
 I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it.
 I fear I wrong the honourable men
 Whose daggers have stabb'd Cæsar : I do fear it.

4 *Cit.* They were traitors : honourable men !

Cit. The will ! the testament !

2 *Cit.* They were villains, murderers : the will ! read the
 will.

Ant. You will compel me, then, to read the will ?
 Then make a ring about the corpse of Cæsar,
 And let me show you him that made the will.
 Shall I descend ? and will you give me leave ?

Citizens. Come down.

2 *Cit.* Descend. (*He comes down from the pulpit.*)

3 *Cit.* You shall have leave.

4 *Cit.* A ring ; stand round.

1 *Cit.* Stand from the hearse ; stand from the body.

2 *Cit.* Room for Antony, most noble Antony !

Ant. Nay, press not so upon me ; stand far off.

Cit. Stand back ! room ! bear back !

Ant. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

You all do know this mantle : I remember

The first time ever Cæsar put it on ;

'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,

That day he overcame the Nervii :—

Look ! in this place ran Cassius' dagger through :

See what a rent the envious Casca made :

Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stabbed ;

And, as he plucked his cursed steel away,

Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it,

As rushing out of doors, to be resolved

If Brutus so unkindly knocked, or no ;

For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel :

Judge, O you gods, how dearly Cæsar lov'd him !

This was the most unkindest cut of all ;

For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,

Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,

Quite vanquished him : then burst his mighty heart ;

And, in his mantle muffling up his face,

Even at the base of Pompey's statue,

Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.

O, what a fall was there, my countrymen !

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,

Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.

O, now you weep ; and, I perceive, you feel

The dint of pity ; these are gracious drops.

Kind souls, what weep you, when you but behold

Our Cæsar's vesture wounded ? Look you here,
Here is himself, marred, as you see, with traitors.

1 *Cit.* O piteous spectacle !

2 *Cit.* O noble Cæsar !

3 *Cit.* O woful day !

4 *Cit.* O traitors, villains !

1 *Cit.* O most bloody sight !

2 *Cit.* We will be revenged : revenge,—about,—seek,—burn,—fire,—kill,—slay !—let not a traitor live. . . .

Ant. Now let it work ! Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt !





CHAPTER VIII.

MENTAL PHILOSOPHY.

FOR many ages a knowledge of the human body was not thought necessary in the art of healing. The cure of disease was a matter of haphazard. Sometimes indiscriminate drugging and bleeding were used. At other times, recourse was had to charms and incantations. Some silly old man or woman was introduced, a rhyme, compounded of profanity and gibberish, was repeated over the patient, and the disease was supposed to be frightened away.

In the present day the custom is very different. A man who aspires to be a physician must make the body the subject of a long, minute, and experimental study. He must learn all the different organs and all their different functions. He must learn all the different laws of the human frame;

and it is upon his power to aid and control these laws that his success in healing is considered to depend.

The treatment of the weaknesses and diseases of the mind has been very much the same. Long ago, indiscriminate drugging—mental drugging—was the rule in teaching. Even bleeding was not altogether unknown. Nay, we may even say that charms and incantations were used. The teacher did his work very much like a magician. With rod in hand he stood over his victim, he made several passes and applications of the rod to the victim's body, he uttered several sentences and verses in an unknown tongue, the victim repeated them after him, and ignorance and vice were supposed to be cast out.

In the present day, these practices, too, have been changed. It is considered necessary that an educator should know psychology, or mental philosophy, that he should understand the nature of the different faculties, and that he should be able to make his teaching harmonise with the laws of the mind. All these qualifications, we say, are considered necessary. Whether they are always found in actual existence is a different matter.

Now, all you who are earnest students are, or will be, educators—educators of yourselves. You cannot be always under the guidance of teachers and lecturers; you must be cast upon your own resources. You cannot be always fed with the spoon; you must be turned adrift to forage for yourselves. And, if you really desire to be rational creatures, you must continue your own education. By far the best part of a man's culture is his self-culture. If you study the lives of great men, you will discover that their greatness arose, not from what had been put into them at school or college, but from what they had acquired by their own mental vigour. Self-education, therefore, is necessary.

But then starts up the *first* question: How should this self-culture be carried on? The answer is: There is only one sure and thorough way. You must look within: you must know a little of psychology. This is such a self-evident proposition that we are almost ashamed to enunciate it. You cannot develop your mind except by stimulating and directing the natural working of its faculties; and you cannot know the working of these faculties unless you watch them attentively. It is true, you may

imitate some great man in his method of study ; but his method will very likely be far too unwieldy for you. The armour which made Saul a tower of strength, would have proved an encumbrance and a weakness to David. At any rate, you will be working altogether in the dark, and will never be sure that you are giving your powers full play. It may therefore be laid down as an axiom, that every one who wishes to be a thoroughly intelligent and successful student, must know a little of psychology.

The *second* question now comes up: From what text-books can a knowledge of psychology be gained ? This, we admit, is a very difficult question. There is no book that is generally acknowledged to be a correct and complete statement of the truths of psychology. We have almost never in this science, as in some of the other sciences, the instance of a philosopher taking up investigations at the point at which some predecessor has stopt them, and carrying them forward towards completion. On the contrary, he generally begins his task by demolishing his predecessors' fabric, and then proceeding to build up his own. The result is, that there are almost as many systems as there are philosophers. Then, too, the theories are

often so subtle and so ethereal that they cannot be apprehended by the general mind. Take, for instance, the question that meets us at the threshold of philosophy: How do we apprehend the material world? We know that an impression is made on our nervous system; but how that impression comes to affect the mind, how the sensation becomes a thought, we do not know. There is a gulf between matter and mind which philosophers, ever since the beginning of speculation, have in vain been trying to bridge over. They have only given us theories which cannot be verified, and which, therefore, are of no practical value.

But fortunately text-books are less necessary in psychology than in any other science. You can get your knowledge by what is, after all, the best way of getting knowledge, namely, by experimenting for yourselves.

Your experimenting laboratory will be your mind, containing subjects, tests, tools, and all; and you can carry it with you safely and easily, and can pursue your investigations anywhere, either at home or a-field. If you adopt the right method, these investigations can easily be performed. Take the

mental processes in turn—perception, memory, imagination, judgment, etc. Take as simple an instance of each as possible: such as, seeing a piece of white paper, remembering a blue sky, imagining a green swan, judging of the certainty of death. Confine your attention to one of these at a time, until you have thoroughly understood it. If you fail to understand it at first, turn to any psychological book you may have at hand, such as Dugald Stewart's *Works*, Sir William Hamilton's *Lectures*, Herbert Spencer's *Psychology*. Study carefully what is there said regarding the subject in hand; and if you do not find the whole truth, you will at least find something which will assist you. But whatever you do, take no information on trust. Test every statement by referring to the simple example which you have summoned up before you. In this way you cannot fail to gain some psychological knowledge.

But here the *third* question occurs: How can this knowledge be applied to ordinary use? This question we shall now proceed to answer. We shall take as specimens certain acknowledged psychological facts or laws. We shall first explain each law; then we shall show how it can be employed in the

training of the understanding; and lastly, we shall prove that this law is followed, consciously or unconsciously, by men who have risen to intellectual eminence.

THE UNITY OF THE MIND.

We find that psychologists are now all agreed in holding the unity of the mind. In everyday language we talk of the mind as if it consisted of different departments and different faculties. We talk of it, in fact, as if it was a model lodging-house consisting of several distinct rooms, and each faculty had a separate room and separate breakfast-table for itself, and went out and in at its own time, and had no connection whatever with any of the other faculties. But this is a loose way of talk. The mind is one and indivisible, and all its faculties are essentially the same. In perception, memory, imagination, judgment, we do virtually the same thing, namely, we apprehend the differences and likenesses among ideas. What else could we do? 'The man does not contain the mind,' says Aristotle, 'it is the mind that contains the man.' Therefore the whole of the mind is available at one

time for one particular object. By means of *attention* all its force can be concentrated upon one idea or part of an idea, and in that way can be made to master almost any difficulty. When the mind, by the force of circumstances, is concentrated upon an object, how vivid that object becomes! Notice, as instances, the ticking of a watch in the silence of midnight, or a single face seen on a dark night in the light of a watch-fire.

Now, here is a most useful and most encouraging fact to know. We need no longer lament that we are deficient in certain faculties, and that we cannot master certain subjects. If we have an intellect at all, we can do almost anything. All that we require is the power of attention, and that is a power which can be gained by practice. By means of it, we can bring all our mental force to bear upon one object; and if that is not sufficient, we can concentrate our mind still further, and bring it to bear upon a part only of the object, and in this way proceed from part to part till the whole is mastered. For example, if we fail to understand the meaning of a sentence, we can concentrate our thoughts first upon the subject, then upon the

predicate, and last of all upon the object, and in that way we can scarcely fail to grasp the meaning. Let our mottoes be: One object at a time, and the whole of the mind upon that one object; if the object cannot be grasped as a whole, then let it be taken in parts.

That this habit of attention or abstraction is one of the chief means by which men grow great, is notorious. It is proved, in the first place, by the testimony of great men themselves. 'There is no other way,' says Malebranche, 'of obtaining light and intelligence but by the labour of attention.' 'Genius,' says Helvetius, 'is nothing but a continued attention.' 'Genius,' says Buffon, 'is only a protracted patience.' And Cuvier varies the expression by calling genius 'the patience of a sound intellect.' It is proved, in the second place, by the practice of great men. They often become so absorbed in study that they lose consciousness of everything else. Newton frequently at the end of the day was unable to tell whether he had dined or not. Cardan, the great mathematician, journeying in a carriage, forgot the way, forgot the object of his journey, did not hear the shouting of the driver,

and only recovered his everyday senses when he found himself under a gallows. The eminent philologer, Budaeus, on the morning of his bridal day, plunged into the composition of his commentaries, and did not awaken to the momentousness of the occasion, until a deputation arrived to inform him that the priest and the bride were waiting.

PERCEPTION.

Philosophers are now agreed that every perception implies an act of contrast. Let us suppose a child looking out upon the world for the first time, and staring upon one colour, say white. As long as no other hue is introduced, it may look on for ever without having the slightest perception or idea. *Idem semper sentire et non sentire, ad idem recidunt.* ‘To feel the same thing always and not to feel at all, come to the same thing.’ But as soon as another hue, say black, is introduced into the field of vision, the child begins to have a notion of colour. The same, it is perfectly evident, must be the case with all the senses. In every perception, therefore, we perform an act of comparison. Other acts are also implied, but this is



the most essential. And those senses that can present to us the most objects simultaneously or almost simultaneously, are the very senses through which we get most of our ideas. This is the reason why the eye and the ear are the great channels of our knowledge.

Now, here we have (simple and self-evident though it may seem) a most practical principle. We have often been told to cultivate our senses, as they are the inlets by which we receive our knowledge of the external world; but we have never been told how such a cultivation can be carried on. We now begin to see the way. Let us, by the aid of the power of attention, throw our whole mind into every important act of perception, and bring out the comparison involved in it as distinctly as we can. Let us, in other words, bring out the particular quality we are apprehending into greater distinctness by contrasting it with a kindred quality. If, for example, we wish to enjoy the delicate fresh green of a spring hedge after a shower, let us contrast it with the dull hue of the road that runs along beside it. Or if we want to appreciate fully the elegant outline of a birch tree

let us contrast it with some unshapely rock, or still more unshapely house, near which it is growing. The same practice may be followed in the case of what philosophers call *compound* perception. You have a friend whom you value very much. Contrast his presence with his absence. In other words, imagine yourself without him; and then you will have a far more lively sense of his value. The grand mass of the Castle Rock is an important feature in Edinburgh. Contrast its presence with its absence. In other words, imagine it gone, and contemplate the blank it would leave; and you will have a far more vivid idea of its importance in the landscape.

This power of seeing contrasts, of discriminating, is one of the chief characteristics of great men. A blockhead we would define to be a being who could not discriminate. To him the world is 'a land where all things always seem the same.' He is a cipher himself, and he casts his shadow over everything he looks upon. 'What's going on?' you say to him. 'Oh, nothing!' 'You had a stroll in the country to-day. What did you see?' 'Nothing.' 'You had a walk along Princes Street. Did you

see anybody?' 'Nobody.' The wonderful rocks upon which this old earth of ours has written so much of her history are to him—stones, mere stones. The plants, so infinitely varied in form, colour, scent, and association, are—' flowers: '

'A primrose by a river's brim,
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more.'

That crowd of people, so endlessly varied in appearance and character, with a deeply-interesting history written in each face, is to him nothing but 'a lot of fellows.' But the man of genius is the very reverse of this. If he is anything at all, he is discriminating. To him no two objects are exactly alike. He sees something new and wonderful in everything. He sees distinctions in the first place, in order that he may see likenesses in the second place, and arrange the objects into classes. This is pre-eminently the characteristic of the man of science. It is also the characteristic of the man of literature; for if you reflect for a moment, you will see that the effect of his most striking pictures arises in a great measure from their skilful contrasts. Take the following as an example:—

‘ All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players :
They have their exits and their entrances ;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
Then, the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then, the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrows. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then, the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances ;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippred pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side ;
His youthful hose, well-saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shanks ; and his big, manly voice
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,—
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.’

MEMORY.

It is interesting to think of the process by which memory is evolved in a child. As he lies staring at the strange world in which he finds himself, and

wondering with all the energy of which his pulpy brains are capable, it is long before he can form a fixed image of the loving face that so frequently bends over him. Sensation is defined by Hegel to be 'the blind groping of the spirit in its unconscious and unintelligent individuality.' At last he contrives to get a distinct impression of the face, and an important stage of his mental development is reached. When he next sees the face he smiles. That is a sign that he recognises it. In other words, it is a sign that the present image has called up the past image, and has been classed along with it. By and by, when other interested female countenances look in upon him, he classes them, not perhaps in the same group as the other face, but certainly in a kindred group; and the best proof of this is the fact that when he comes to use the babyish name for mother, he applies it to them all indiscriminately.

Thus it happens that what is generally called committing to memory is nothing else than a process of classification. Every present idea, or group of ideas, has a natural tendency to join itself to some past idea, or group of ideas. What is it that makes them cohere? It is the old reason, of 'like drawing

to like.' They are either like in themselves or in their relations. That is to say, that they have either the same qualities, or they are connected with the same time or the same place. In this way the mind, just like the body, may be said to build itself up by a process of assimilation.

Thus we can see what a wonderful arrangement a human memory is. If you reflect for a moment, you will discover that you are always carrying about with you in your waking moments a consciousness of your past life, of the chief places in which you have lived, and of the chief events that have happened in your career—a picture, in fact, of the world, with the objects localized and set in perspective. This consciousness may often be faint, but whenever your attention is turned back upon it, in one instant it brightens and becomes quite distinct. Your past existence, therefore, is still a part of yourselves. It is crowded with experiences, and groups of experiences, all living and active; and whenever any present experience occurs which bears any likeness to them, they seize upon it and take it into living union with themselves. It is in this way that your present life is ever united with your past.

Now, here we have a fact which can furnish us with a method for acquiring knowledge. The usual rule is: 'Take all the facts just as they come, cram them into your mind in any order, and keep them there by dint of frequent repetition.' In other words: 'Hold your nose and gulp them down.' This is a most unnatural method. The natural method is very different. See every fact and group of facts as clearly and distinctly as you can; ascertain the fact in your past experience to which it bears a likeness or relation, and then associate it with that fact. And this rule can be applied to almost every case. Take as an example that most difficult of all efforts, namely, the beginning of a new study where all the details are strange. All that you have to do is to begin with those details that can be associated with your past experience. In science, begin with the specimens with which you are already familiar, and group around them as many of the other specimens as you can. In history and geography, commence with the facts relating to the places and scenes which you actually know. And in foreign languages, start with the words and phrases for the most familiar objects and incidents of everyday life. In this way

you will give all your knowledge a clear and safe foundation in your own experience.

That this is the method pursued by great men there cannot be a doubt. A few instances will suffice. Sir Walter Scott got his first real lessons in history, not in the class-room, but in those old castles which he visited so assiduously. Hugh Miller learned the rudiments of geology, not from books, but from the stones of a quarry where he wrought as a mason. And Gibbon first conceived that enthusiasm and grandeur of plan for which his great work is so remarkable, during a few months which he spent among the ruins of Rome.

IMAGINATION.

Imagination is the power by which we call up and combine the images of our past experiences. It does not create the images, as some people fancy. It simply draws them from the memory, and forms them into new combinations. It is a most essential faculty. Not only does it give us the means of anticipating the future, not only does it enable us to enter into the feelings and thoughts of others, but it is by its agency that we are able to gather

information from books. For just consider the process that goes on while we read. We read certain words and phrases; these words and phrases call up certain images with which they have been associated in our mind; we combine these images into a picture or representation, and thus try to grasp the meaning of the author.

Now, it is perfectly evident that our power of understanding an author will depend very much upon our powers of observation. If we are careless observers of the phenomena of life, the images which the words of an author will summon up will be very vague, and our comprehension of the author's meaning must therefore be vague also. But if we are close, and keen, and careful observers, the result will be the very reverse.

From what we have said, you can now deduce a simple practical rule for the cultivation of the imagination. If you wish to imagine accurately and vividly, you must observe accurately and vividly. Go through the world with all your senses open, and with your mind in your senses. See, hear, feel intently, and meditate upon what you see, hear, and feel. And at the same time employ all the

helps for making your knowledge more palpable. Examine and study scientific specimens, antiquarian remains, and plans and pictures of distant objects and places. In this way lay up in your memory a store of clear and correct images for future use.

This method has undoubtedly been practised by all those who have been noted for their feats of imagination. The greatest novelists are those who have mixed with all classes of society, and have been most intent upon studying incident and character. The greatest poets are those who have pored most assiduously over the great phenomena of nature. The greatest inventors and discoverers are those who have been ever ready to take hints from what they have seen going on around them. As a proof of this, we need only refer to the fact that Galileo got the first notion of the pendulum from the swinging of a censer in the Cathedral of Pisa; that Sir Samuel Brown got his idea of a suspension bridge from a spider's web which he saw hanging from the bushes on a dewy morning; and that Brunel took his first lessons in boring the Thames Tunnel from a little ship-worm that he observed cutting its way through a piece of wood.

GENERALIZATION.

The mind cannot master many disconnected details. It becomes perplexed and then helpless. It must generalize these details. It must arrange them into groups, all kept together according to one or other of the three great laws of association: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.

This, it will be granted at once, must be the method in all rigidly systematic studies, such as the sciences, history, biography, and politics. But it is valuable to ordinary people to know that the same plan can be used in all kinds of description. Every collection of details can be arranged in groups in such a way that they can be clearly understood and remembered. The following is the manner in which this can be done: In studying any interesting scene, let your mind look carefully at all the details. You will then become conscious of one or more effects or impressions that have been made upon you. Discover what these impressions are. Then group and describe in order the details which tend to produce each of the impressions. You will then find that you have comprised in your description all

the important details of the scene. As an instance, let us suppose that a writer is out in the country on a morning towards the end of May, and wishes to describe the multitudinous objects which delight his senses. First of all, he ascertains that the general impressions produced on his mind by the summer landscape are the ideas of *luxuriance*, *brightness*, and *joy*. He then proceeds to describe in these groups the details which produce these impressions. He first takes up the *luxuriant* features: the springing young crops of grain completely hiding the red soil; the rich, living carpet of grass and flowers covering the meadow; the hedge-rows on each side of the way, in their bright summer green; the trees bending gracefully under the full weight of their foliage; and the wild plants, those waifs of nature, flourishing everywhere, smothering the woodland brook, filling up each scar and crevice in the rock, and making a rich fringe along the side of every highway and footpath. He then descants upon the *brightness* of the landscape: the golden sunshine; the pearly dew-drops hanging on the tips of every blade of grass, and sparkling in the morning rays; the clusters of daisies

dappling the pasture land; the dandelion glowing under the very foot of the traveller; the chestnut trees, like great candelabra, stuck all over with white lights, lighting up the woodlands; and lilacs, laburnums, and hawthorns in full flower, making the farmer's garden one mass of variegated blossom. And last of all, he can dwell upon the *joy* that is abroad on the face of the earth: the little birds so full of one feeling that they can only trill it forth in the same delicious monotone; the lark bounding into the air, as if eager and quivering to proclaim his joy to the whole world; the humble bee humming his satisfaction as he revels among the flowers; and the myriads of insects floating in the air, and poising, and darting with drowsy buzz through the floods of golden sunshine. Thus we see that, by this habit of generalizing, the mind can grasp the details of almost any scene.

This desire to unify knowledge, to see unity in variety, is one of the most noted characteristics of great men in all departments of learning. Scientific men in the present day are eager to resolve all the phenomena of nature into force or energy. The history of philosophy, too, is in a great measure

taken up with attempts to prove that being and knowing are identical. And Emerson can find no better definition of genius than that it is 'intellect constructive.' 'Perhaps,' he says, 'if we should meet Shakespeare, we should not be conscious of any great inferiority, but of a great equality, only that he possessed a great skill of using—of classifying—his facts, which we lacked.'

FEELING.

It is a fact in psychology, that along with every intellectual act there is a state of feeling. This feeling stimulates the mind. It is the gush of the mountain stream setting the machinery in motion. The highest form which this feeling can take, is sympathy with the Creator, an earnest desire to look on while He is working in the world around us, to understand His plans, and to enter, as it were, into His very thoughts. It is that divine enthusiasm for everything true and beautiful. It is that devoted love of knowledge for its own sake. It is, in other words, that reverent, childlike wonder which Sir William Hamilton called 'the mother of knowledge.'

Full of this childlike wonder, we sit by and

watch while our Great Father works. We see Him acting in the forces of matter, in the growth of plants, in the instincts of the lower animals, and in the sympathies and noble aspirations of men. Sometimes we can only look on and admire, and then we are simply lovers of nature:

‘Contented if we may enjoy
What others understand.’

Sometimes, urged on by a desire to master what we see, we try to collect the facts into bundles, or, in other words, to classify them; and then we become philosophers, or historians, or biographers. Sometimes, too, under the influence of the loftiest ambition, we strive to imitate the Great Worker. We cannot make new materials; but selecting our materials from His materials, and carefully following His method, we form new combinations, and produce representations of persons, actions, and scenes. We become, in a certain sense, creators: artists, or epic poets, or novelists, or dramatists.

Here, now, is a most potent feeling which ought to be cultivated by every one. But an important question arises: How can a man who is without

this feeling acquire it? The task is easy. If you have no wonder, your mind must be blinded with conceit. Throw away your conceit, and be humble and childlike. Go forth into the world with open senses and open heart. Place yourself face to face with the works of God. If any part appears more congenial to you than the others, that is the part which you must choose. You will thus be able to throw your whole soul into it; and throwing your whole soul into it, you will enter into its secret recesses, and will not fail to see in it much that is wonderful.

That great philosophers and poets are influenced by this feeling of wonder, cannot be doubted. Here, as elsewhere, extremes meet. The greatest are the lowliest; and the wisest are those that are readiest to confess that they know almost nothing. Newton's comparison of himself to a child on the sea-shore is well known; and Sir William Hamilton held that our highest knowledge was the knowledge of our own ignorance. Professor Ferrier, too, declared that 'genius is nothing else than the power of seeing wonders in common things.'

How this feeling of wonder pervades and stimulates

the life of a philosopher, is beautifully described by Longfellow in his poem on the 'Fiftieth Birthday of Agassiz':

' It was fifty years ago,
In the pleasant month of May,
In the beautiful Pays de Vaud,
A child in its cradle lay.

' And Nature, the old nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying : " Here is a story-book
Thy Father has written for thee."

' "Come, wander with me," she said,
" Into regions yet untrod ;
And read what is still unread
In the manuscripts of God."

' And he wandered away and away
With Nature, the dear old nurse,
Who sang to him night and day
The rhymes of the universe.

' And whenever the way seemed long,
Or his heart began to fail,
She would sing a more wonderful song,
Or tell a more marvellous tale.

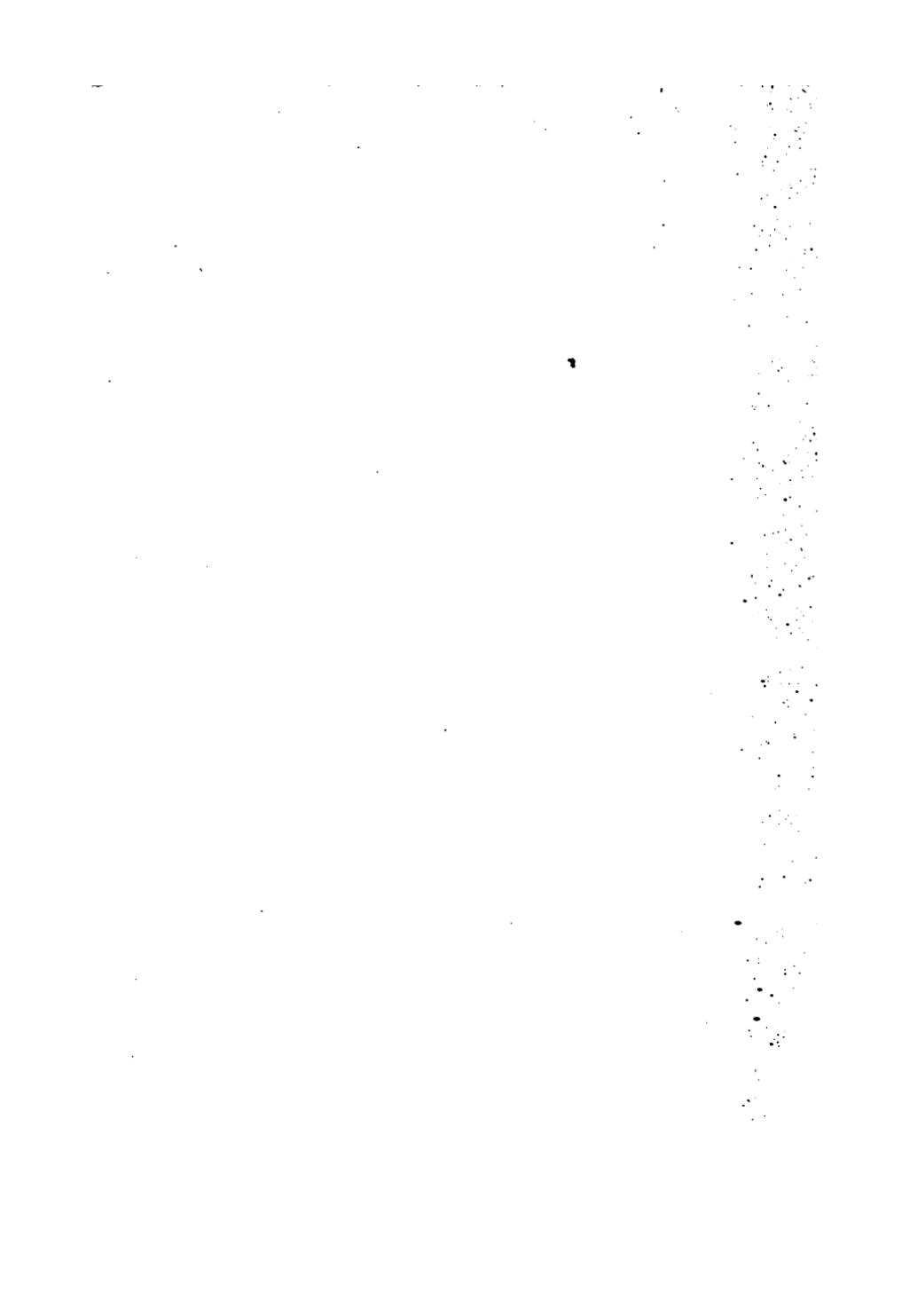
' So she keeps him still a child,
And will not let him go,
Though at times his heart beats wild
For the beautiful Pays de Vaud.'

We have thus described certain cases in which

well-ascertained facts regarding the human mind may be made useful. Other instances might easily be given. But we have done enough to show that a knowledge of mental philosophy is necessary to the successful cultivation of our own mental powers.

THE END.

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